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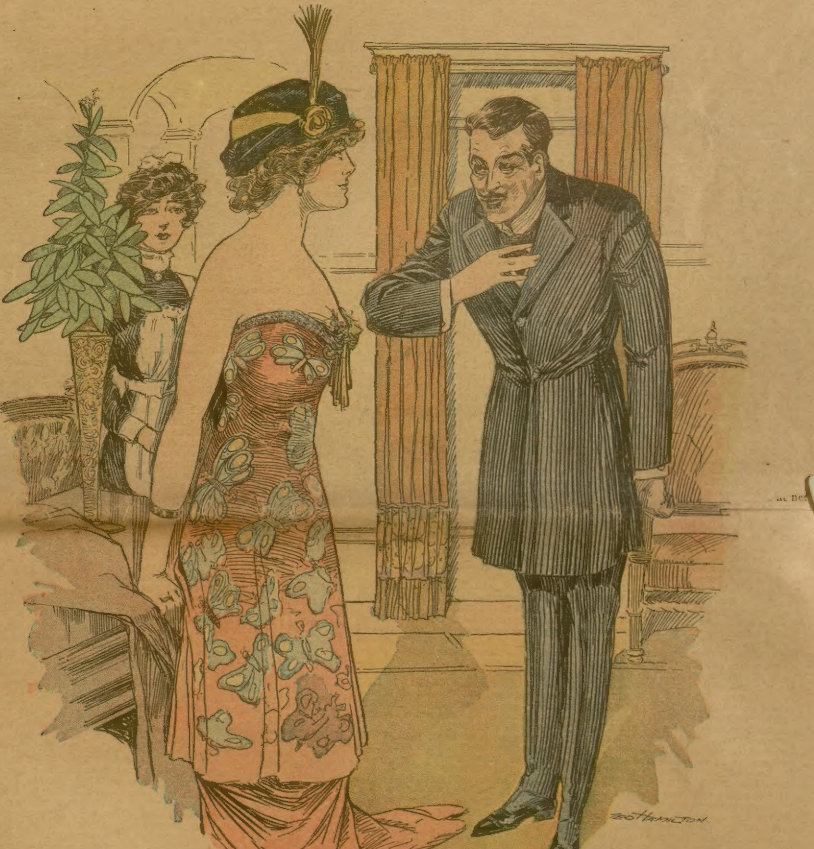

Hunting the Red Gown

Or, Molly Finnegan, Amateur Sleuth :: :: :: By Helen E. Haskell

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CHAPTER I.

THE red gown was finished. Mrs. Ritchie Van Horn twisted her supple back and looked over her shoulder at the fish-tail train spread out in two sharp points on the sheet that had been laid on the floor of the little cubical room, then faced about and surveyed the front of the gown in the full-length mirror.

"It seems to me a trifle showy—too many spangles—too——"

The door of the fitting-room opened. Tizzoni, the Italian, looking like an exclamation point in his closely buttoned frock coat, stood in the doorway. For a moment he gazed at the gown, speechless, then threw out his hands, palms up, and tossed back his head, his pale lips parted in a puckered smile over his yellow teeth.

"Ah, but you are ravishing, madama. A proud arisa in da eenside of me dat I have designa one soocha exqueesite robe. Your husband will be delight. Turn about, please. I woulda observe da back. Ah, but eet ees perfection. Soocha lines, soocha grace! Eet ees a poem."

"One moment," exclaimed Amelie Van Horn, throwing up a silencing hand, "Is it not overloaded with these spangley things?"

"Not for soocha woman lika you, madama. I have looka in your eyes, Day sparkle lika da spangles on da gown, but oonderneath, I da tragedy see, burning lika da red seeik of da robe."

Amelie Van Horn laughed. "How amusing," she said half under her breath.

"Not amusing, madama. I am an arteest. I oonderstanda da temperament."

The dressmaker folded his arms, and as his face fell into its natural lines, Amelie Van Horn felt a chill run over her. There was a saturnine expression in the man's gray eyes. The parenthetical lines about his thick-lipped mouth were deeply drawn. There were gray shadows in his cheeks. It occurred to her that Tizzoni had been working out his own temperament in the red gown, rather than hers. His enthusiasm of a moment since seemed like a fluff of white foam glancing across tragic waters.

"You may send the gown. I will wear it tomorrow night. Then, if Major Van Horn thinks it is overtrimmed, I suppose you will remove some of the beading."

Tizzoni's close-cropped brush of a mustache sprang up under his nose, revealing his fanglike teeth.

"Ah, eet ees da fear of Major Van Horn dat has maka you hesitate. Belleva me, madama," he held up a bony forefinger, "I knowa da mans. You weara da red gown. You appear in da middle of some admiring peopla. Da mans turna to look. Day exclaim, 'Ah, what a dream ees dat so beautiful a womans, what a loocka man ees dat Major Van Horn!' Verra queeckly your husband throwa out his chest—he bursta heemself wid delight. More better dan ever before he lika hees wife. Why?" Tizzoni's mustache sprang up. He thrust his head forward, his eyes glittering. "Because he lika only what hees frans admire. Do not fear. Major Van Horn will pleasa heemself with da red gown. He weel eet embrace."

The dressmaker chuckled and rubbed his palms together, while he surveyed the gown critically, pointed out one or two changes that he wished made in the draping of the overdress, and turned to leave the fitting-room.

As he grasped the doorknob Amelie [illegible]ped him. A question had [illegible] She asked it in spite of her better judgment, which warned her against discussing personalities with the man.

"Do you know Major Van Horn?"

"Knowa Major Van Horn?" The dressmaker's eyes narrowed. "Knowa your husband? What for you aska dat question?" He bowed elaborately, backing from the room. He paused just outside the doorway. "I knowa all da mans, Madama Van Horn, when I knowa one. Da mans are lika da dresses dat come already put togedder froma da shops. Do not be disturb, madama. Your husband weel no finda da faults een my so beautiful creation. He weel be enrapture. He weel giva you hees so full pocketbook to buya more gowns of one so great arteest lika your mos' humble Tizzoni." He bowed and took a backward step. "When your husband embrace dis one so han'soma gown, you weel see dat I have spoka mos' knowing. Ah, he weel eet embrace, your one so brava husband, da pretta signor."

He chuckled and drew the door softly together. Amelie Van Horn glanced once more at the flame-colored gown with its filmy overdress of chiffon, heavy with embroidered lotus flowers, glistening bees and butterflies. Then her eyes swept up and rested for a moment on her reflected face.

Her cheeks were flushed, her tenderly dished, too small mouth, with its slightly hardened outline, was redder than usual. Even her cleft chin showed a spot of color. She sighed, recalling the dressmaker's words. Then she shrugged her shoulders in a attempt to throw off a sudden depression of spirits.

"Unhook the gown, please," she said to the fitter who was waiting.

The girl began to unfasten the hooks. Presently she spoke.

"Tizzoni calls your gown his masterpiece," she said, with a little laugh. "He seems quite mad about it. In the workroom we call it 'the master's pet.' "

Amelie Van Horn slipped her arms into her tailored shirtwaist and put on her skirt. Then, picking up her jacket, she turned to the girl with a smile, saying: "You will send the dress tomorrow without fail?"

"Oh, yes. Tizzoni never disappoints his customers," replied the girl, taking the jacket from Mrs. Van Horn and holding it for her.

Then with the red dress hanging limply over her arm, she flitted away, while Amelie Van Horn passed thru the brown-and-gold reception-room into the dingy outside corridor, and was whisked down the four flights to the street below. As she stepped into the waiting taxi she glanced up at the dressmaker's windows.

Tizzoni stood looking down at her, his upper lip drawn away from his teeth.

CHAPTER II.

TIZZONI brought the red gown to the Van Horn house himself, the following evening. He told Molly, the housemaid, a pert minx with tip-tilted eyes and nose, mouth, too, for that matter, and with a saucy way of tying her apron strings, that he would wait in the hall until Madam Van Horn had looked the dress over. Five minutes afterward, when Molly returned to report that Mrs. Van Horn found everything satisfactory, Tizzoni had disappeared.

A little later, Maj. Ritchie Van Horn came in and went at once to his study. He was in a black temper, plastered over—as Molly put it when writing up her notebook the following day—with a thin layer of suavity.

"Beastly night," he said, thrusting his dripping umbrella into the rack and pitching his overcoat at Molly. "Where's your mistress?"

He smiled as he asked the question, his upper lip lifting at the corners and showing the points of his sharp eyeteeth.

"She's dressing for dinner," replied Molly from the hall closet, carefully adjusting the hanger inside the coat.

"Tell her not to wait for me. I had a snack at the club." He paused, standing with his feet wide apart and his hands thrust into his pockets, looking at Molly with the square-cornered smile that she had learned to interpret as meaning either temper or whisky, sometimes both. "I have some matters to attend to that will keep me busy for a couple of hours. I don't want to be interrupted. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Molly understood perfectly. The Major wanted to avoid seeing his wife.

"If a man named Colton comes, send him in at once." Molly nodded and turned to go. "One minute. Is your mistress going out?"

"Yes, she is going to hear 'Parsifal.' Had you forgotten?" Molly felt that the question was indiscreet, but it popped out without warning.

"Entirely," replied Major Van Horn, muttering under his breath as he entered the library, closing the door softly behind him.

"The madder he is, the softer he catfoots," murmured Molly, going down the basement stairs.

At half-past seven Mr. Colton arrived. Molly, having taken his coat, showed him at once into the library, which opened into Major Van Horn's study. Then she went upstairs to hook the red gown.

Mrs. Van Horn was standing in front of the mirror, and Molly, pausing in the doorway, gasped at the picture her mistress made. Mrs. Van Horn smiled, her color heightening.

"Hook me up at once, please," she said, "so that I shall not keep the Major waiting for his dinner."

"Major Van Horn dined at his club. He asked me to tell you. There is a gentleman in the library with him now."

Mrs. Van Horn's dusky eyebrows drew together. The line of her lips thinned. She had been impatient for Major Van Horn's opinion of the red gown.

"I did not hear Major Van Horn come upstairs. Has he dressed for the opera?"

"He seemed to have forgotten that you were going. I spoke of it. He said that he should be busy—that he could not be interrupted."

Amelie Van Horn's eyes flashed. "It is unbearable," she said under her breath. Then she spoke aloud. "Who is with the Major?"

"I think the name was Colton—a youngish man with—you will have to stand more patiently, please. It is difficult to find the eyelets among these spangles, and when you jerk, as you did just now, I'm likely to tear the net."

"What was Mr. Colton's first name?" asked Mrs. Van Horn, ignoring Molly's reproof.

"I don't remember. The card is on the tray. I did not take it in to Major Van Horn because he told me to send the young man right in when he came. There, that's the last hook." Molly drew back and surveyed the red gown. "You certainly look like a picture. It is too bad the Major is not going to see you."

Molly sighed and moved toward the door. Her hand was on the knob.

"One moment," called Mrs. Van Horn. "How did Mr. Colton look? Very thin —tall—" her voice sank to a whisper—"with a dark mustache and stooping shoulders?"

"And rather yellow," supplemented Molly.

"Oh!"

Molly turned.

Amelie Van Horn stood in the middle of the room, her eyes staring straight in front of her. Her under lip was caught between her teeth. Her bosom rose and fell spasmodically. One hand clutched the spangled front of her bodice, the other was tightly clinched at her side.

"Yes?" inquired Molly, as if reminding her mistress that she was not alone.

Mrs. Van Horn's eyes lost their vacant expression, rested on Molly. Her little teeth relaxed their hold on her under lip. But her face did not lose its look of fear. Or was it sorrow? Or merely a great surprise?

"Will you bring me Mr. Colton's card? I think—I think—it is possible that he is an old friend."

Molly was gone but a minute. Yet, when she returned her mistress was seated at her desk where she was sealing an envelope with purple wax. Molly crossed the room, holding out the tiny Oriental salver on which rested a single visiting card. As she stood waiting for her mistress to look up, Mrs. Van Horn picked up her silver seal, cut with the Van Horn crest, dropped it, and reached for a hatpin with a carved ivory head that was thrust into the holder hanging from the cheval. She pressed the carved ivory into the wax.

"Here is the card, Mrs. Van Horn," said Molly.

Her mistress started. "Oh, yes. I forgot for a moment." She took the card, glanced at it, and dropped it on the tray. Upon it she placed the letter she had written.

"When Mr. Colton leaves, I want you to give him that letter." She hesitated. "I do not wish Major Van Horn to see it." A gold mesh bag lay on the leaf of the desk. Mrs. Van Horn opened it, took out a bill, and thrust it into Molly's left hand. "That's for you, Molly. You are a faithful girl. Now, go, and please be careful. The letter is for Mr. Colton —for nobody else. You understand?"

"Yes. Thank you."

Halfway downstairs Molly stopped and looked at the letter. It was addressed to Mr. Frederick Colton. Molly whistled under her breath. The name had been written before Mrs. Van Horn had seen the card. It was evident that she had been very certain about the first name of the man who was closeted in the library with her husband. Then Molly unfolded the bill. Her tip-tilted mouth fell apart.

"A ten-spot as I am alive!" she whispered, forgetting to speak elegantly. "Believe me, there is something doing in this house tonight."

Molly thrust the bill into the bosom of her dress, and going to the dining-room gave the finishing touches to the table. As she passed the library door on her way to announce to her mistress that dinner was served, she paused.

"If you have any honor, Major Ritchie Van Horn, I appeal to it for the sake of the hundred or more unsuspecting subscribers who have put their money into this thing. If you still refuse—perhaps your mirror will help you recall one night in Venice—three years ago—when for once a low-down scoundrel was given his deserts."

Molly heard the words distinctly. They were spoken in an angrily resonant, high-pitched voice. They were interrupted by Major Van Horn's snarling tones and what sounded to Molly like the blow of a fist on a table top. Then a door upstairs opened and closed. Looking up, Molly saw Mrs. Van Horn standing at the head of the stairs.

"Dinner is served," whispered Molly, and disappeared into the dining-room.

An hour later, Molly slipped the letter Mrs. Van Horn had written into Mr. Colton's hand. The young man had hurled himself precipitately into the hall, and throwing his overcoat over one arm, had started toward the front door.

"One moment, sir," whispered Molly, who had been waiting on the stairs. "Mrs. Van Horn asked me to give you this." She held out the letter.

The young man took it, looked at it dazedly, and thrust it into his pocket. His face was pallid, his lips compressed. He threw open the front door. As the raw night wind struck Molly's face, she started to speak.

"It's turned off right cold since it stopped raining, sir. Better let me help you into your coat."

The door closed with a slam. Molly raised her eyebrows. "Poor young man. Seems to have had the worst of it in his quarrel with the Major." She reached up and switched out all but one of the softly shaded hall lights, then yawned. "I wonder how late the opera will be. I don't feel as if I could keep awake until midnight. If Major Van Horn was like any other man he'd wait up for his wife and unhook her himself."

She paused in front of the library door. There was no sound on the other side of the panels.

"I suppose it would be as much as my job is worth to rap and ask the Major if he wants anything," she continued, walking toward the basement stairs.

CHAPTER III.

THE sound of a door opening and closing somewhere awakened Molly, whose room was at the top of the house in front, directly above Mrs. Van Horn's sitting-room. She rubbed her eyes sleepily and sat up.

"Mrs. Van Horn must have let herself in. I wonder why she didn't ring."

Molly, who had gone to sleep, fully dressed, on the outside of her bed, got up and groped her way drowsily to the door, which she had left open, fearing that she would miss hearing her mistress' ring. She switched on the light in the back hall, and hurrying downstairs to the second floor, passed Major Van Horn's room, then paused. From the spot where she stood she had a view not only of the stairway leading up from the first floor, but of the front door, which stood wide open, framing the gray light of early morning.

"Why, it's dawn!" said Molly, speaking aloud. She started down the stairs, drawing back suddenly and concealing herself in the shadows.

In the open doorway below stood Mrs. Ritchie Van Horn, wearing a long dark ulster, her head wound in a scarf. She held a bunch of newspapers in her hand. She entered the hall, glanced sharply around, then softly closed the door. She groped her way upstairs without turning on the lights. Molly slipped behind the half-open door that separated the back stairway from the front of the house. Mrs Van Horn advanced noiselessly, entered her bedroom, closing the door carefully, and turning the key in its lock. A light glowed softly thru the transom.

Molly crept back to her own room, raised her window shade, and looked at the clock. It was almost seven. The cook's alarm would go off in a few minutes.

"Poor Mrs. Van Horn," she murmured, cupping her palms and filling them with cold water. "Another attack of insomnia, I suppose." She splashed the water over her face, redressed, perking her apron bows jauntily, and went downstairs. She had just finished airing the dining-room when Mrs. Van Horn rang.

"That means breakfast in bed," murmured Molly, hastening to answer the peremptory summons. "Poor soul, I don't blame her. Lying awake must be a trial. And how can she sleep with her heart wrung by her husband's cruel indifference? How I pity her, so handsome, yet unloved!"

Mrs. Van Horn was standing in her door when Molly reached the head of the stairs. Her hair was drawn back and twisted into a tight knot at the nape of her neck. She was fully dressed in shirtwaist and skirt, altho she wore her room slippers. Her face was pale, but her eyes blazed above triangular blue shadows. In her hand she was holding a large white box which was crossed and recrossed with twine. As Molly approached, she backed into her room, and the girl, following her, saw that the floor was littered with tissue paper. Several newspapers had been stuffed into the grate. The black ulster which Mrs. Van Horn had worn earlier had been thrown on the couch near the window. The black scarf trailed on the floor from a cretonne-covered chair.

"Good morning, Mrs. Van Horn," said Molly, cheerily. "Did you sleep well?"

"Abominably. The music kept beating thru my head, and when I could stand it no longer I got up and dressed."

"Perhaps it was the coffee last night. It was strong."

"No doubt. Have you seen the Major?" Mrs. Van Horn spoke nervously. She still held the large white box, her fingers thrust beneath the twine.

"No. It is not yet eight o'clock."

"Then he'll not want breakfast for

some time, probably." Mrs Van Horn seemed to be speaking her thoughts aloud.

"It takes him an hour to dress, and he hasn't drawn his hot shaving water yet. We always know when he runs the hot water, it makes such a noise in the tank behind the range."

Mrs. Van Horn's shoulders relaxed as if relieved of a weight. Then her figure tensed itself. She held out the box.

"If you make haste you can take this box to the F Street express office and get back in time to serve his breakfast."

Molly reached for the box. Blazoned across its front in gold letters was the name, Tizzoni, partly obliterated by four lines of purple ink. Underneath was written:

"J. C. Steinberg,
"——Columbus Avenue,
New York City."

"Send it prepaid, please," said Mrs. Van Horn, opening the gold mesh bag and taking out a bill. "And hurry back. The Major must have his breakfast on time this morning."

Molly started toward the door.

"Just a minute." Mrs. Van Horn laid a detaining hand on the girl's arm. Molly paused, her uptilted eyes questioning.

"Don't take the time to go upstairs for your hat and coat. Slip on my ulster and run out the front way."

As Molly thrust her arms into the loose sleeves of the coat, Mrs. Van Horn went to her closet, and, coming back with a small dark hat, jammed it upon Molly's head. "I'm very anxious to get the box started off early. It occurred to me during the night that tomorrow was Mrs.—Mrs. Steinberg's birthday. I always try to remember it."

The thought flashed thru Molly's mind that her mistress was lying.

Mrs. Van Horn opened the door. "Please get back as quickly as you can."

CHAPTER IV.

MOLLY hurried down the street, swinging the large box, which was peculiarly light, by its string. The air was crisp and bright after the storm of the night before, and the streets were already beginning to throb with life. Market boys in white aprons dashed here and there delivering their early morning orders. Fresh-complexioned young men and women flashed by on their way to shops and offices. Newsboys shouted their wares. Molly left her box at the express office, pocketed her receipt, and was just entering Lafayette square when the words of a newsboy attracted her attention.

"All about the death of Frederick Colton! Woman in the case!"

Molly's heart seemed to turn completely over. Pulling up the skirts of Mrs. Van Horn's heavy ulster, she ran after the boy, grasped him by the shoulder and thrust a nickel of Mrs. Van Horn's change into his hand.

"Herald? Post?" questioned the boy.

"Both," replied Molly, seizing the papers and tucking one under her arm while she opened the other. She glanced across the top of the page, expecting to find the story so strenuously advertised by the newsboy played up in great scare heads. Failing to find the name of Frederick Colton in the headlines at the top of the page, she sank into a park seat and ran her fingers down the columns. Halfway down the fourth column the finger halted.

"Dead in Restaurant." Molly read the announcement aloud. Then, moving her lips, as if to help her mind in grasping the import of the headlines, she went on:

"Man named Colton found dead in Knickerbocker restaurant. His companion disappears. Woman in red gown is being sought by the police. It is thought she can throw some light on mysterious death of young man. Colton a stranger in Washington."

Underneath, in smaller type, was printed a full account of the story. Molly read it eagerly.

"Mr. Frederick Colton of San Francisco was found dead at eleven o'clock last evening in a private dining-room in the Knickerbocker restaurant. A handsome young woman, wearing a red satin gown and a long black satin evening coat, had come to the restaurant early in the evening and had engaged a private dining-room. She gave no order, explaining that she was expecting a friend named Colton, and directed that he be shown to her dining-room at once. At a quarter of eleven Mr. Colton came to the restaurant. He was taken immediately to the room where the woman in red was waiting. A few minutes later he made out his order and gave it to waiter number seven. The waiter, upon returning to the room at eleven o'clock, found Mr. Colton dead, his head resting in his arms, which were outstretched on the table. The woman in red had disappeared.

"Dr. Speyer was at once summoned. He made a cursory examination of the body, and said that the young man had doubtless died of heart disease. The body was removed to the National Undertaking Establishment, where an autopsy will be held this morning.

"A card found in Mr. Colton's pocket gave his address as San Francisco. His Washington residence is unknown. Inquiry last evening developed the fact that he was not registered at any of the downtown hotels.

"A letter written on white linen paper and signed 'Carita' was found in the young man's coat pocket. It was very short and was without date or headline. Its envelope was addressed to Mr. Frederick Colton and was doubtless delivered by a messenger. It was sealed with purple wax, the impress in the wax showing the imperfect head of a dragon. This letter was no doubt written by the woman in red, as in it Mr. Colton was asked to meet the writer as soon as possible at the Knickerbocker restaurant, and was directed to give his name to the doorman, who would show him to the proper room.

"Neither the waiter nor the doorman at the Knickerbocker saw the face of Mr. Colton's companion. When she entered the restaurant her features were veiled with a chiffon scarf. Later, when the waiter went to the dining-room to take Mr. Colton's order, his companion was standing in the corner of the room, where she seemed to be searching for something in the pocket of her coat, which had been hung up. He describes her, however, as tall, slender, and elegant-looking, and thinks he would remember her gown if he should see it again, altho he is unable to describe it, further than to say that it was red and lavishly embroidered with bumblebees and silver flowers."

"No wonder Mrs. Van Horn couldn't sleep," said Molly to herself, as she tucked the paper under her arm and again started toward home. "If the Major finds out there'll be an awful row. My, but it's just like a man to die suddenly like that and make a scandal! Mrs. Van Horn must be frightened almost to death." Molly paused in her soliloquy, then sighed romantically. "Poor Mr. Colton, I suppose he had heart disease. He was probably an old admirer, and the sight of his former sweetheart just killed him. People in high life certainly have exciting times."

As she reached the alley at the end of the block she again picked up the skirts of the black ulster and scampered over the cobblestones. It was striking eight. The Major's breakfast must be ready when he wanted it, no matter how many good-looking young men dropped dead in downtown restaurants.

CHAPTER V.

MAJOR VAN HORN had not yet come down when Molly carried breakfast upstairs to her mistress at nine o'clock. Mrs. Van Horn, who had dressed herself in one of her prettiest morning gowns and arranged her hair as usual, was standing in front of the fireplace, which was filled with charred paper. She glanced up as Molly entered.

"Has Major Van Horn come down?"

"Not yet, and Katie says he hasn't run the hot water." Molly tried to appear unconcerned. "I got the box off all right."

Mrs. Van Horn started. "Oh, yes. I had almost forgotten it." The corners of Molly's mouth twitched. "Have the newspapers come?"

"Yes. Katie brought them in. They are on the dining-room table. Would you like to see them?"

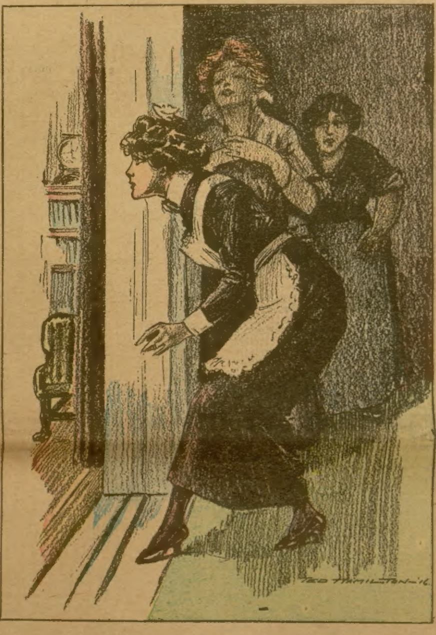
"No, I was just wondering if they had come. The Major is always so particular about having them the first thing."

Molly tried to appear unconscious of the papers still smoldering in the fireplace.

"I know," she said. "Shall I rap on his door? He has overslept nearly an hour. He will be annoyed."

"Oh, let him sleep, Molly. Let him sleep as long as he will. Sleep is such a good thing for the nerves." There was a falsetto note in Mrs. Van Horn's voice. Her hand shook as she lifted her coffee cup.

"All right, Mrs. Van Horn." Molly turned toward the door, then stopped. "The last time we neglected to call him he stormed terribly."



At the door the three women hesitated

Mrs. Van Horn looked frightened. "That was because he had an engagement. I don't believe he has anything important on for today."

Molly gave her mistress a sidelong glance and left the room. Five minutes later, armed with broom and dusters, she entered the library. Going to the window that faced the south, she raised the shade, then turned, started, gave one wild shriek, and fled.

Lying face down on the floor in front of the writing table, one arm thrown out in front of him, the other doubled under his breast, lay Maj. Ritchie Van Horn. On the rug there was a large, ominously dark stain.

Still clutching her broom, Molly clattered down the basement stairs, threw open the kitchen door, and collapsed against the sink.

"What's the matter with yez?" asked Katie, the cook, irritated by Molly's precipitous entrance.

"The Major—" gasped Molly, "on the floor—dead—murdered—send for the police!"

"What are ye talking about?" demanded the phlegmatic Katie, taking her hands from the dishwater and seizing Molly's wrist in a wet grasp. "What's the matter with yez?"

Molly sank into the nearest chair, fanning herself weakly with a dustcloth.

"Major Van Horn—on the library floor—in his own blood!" She began to sob hysterically, wiping her eyes futilely with the duster. "Call the doctor—get the police——"

Very softly the kitchen door swung back. Molly looked up. Amelie Van Horn in her creamy lace room gown, her soft hair rippling back from her temples, stood in the doorway.

"I heard somebody shriek. What is the matter?"

"Major Van Horn—upstairs on the library floor!" sobbed Molly, trying to speak coherently.

"Molly, restrain yourself. What has happened?" Mrs. Van Horn's usually mellow voice rang out sharp and high. She grasped Molly's arm.

Molly made a tremendous effort to regain her self-control. She sat up, pushed her hair back from her forehead and looked steadily at her mistress. Her shoulders still shook convulsively, but when she spoke there was no quaver in her voice.

"I went into the library to tidy up. The shades were down and it was quite dark, so that I did not see him at first." Mrs. Van Horn clutched the lace at her throat.

"Go on," she gasped.

"Then, when I raised the shades, I looked around. I saw him lying on the floor back of the table, face down. There was a pool—a pool of blood!" Molly's voice died away in a shriek.

Mrs. Van Horn shivered. "Of whom are you speaking, Molly?" she demanded, as calmly as she could. "Who was lying on the floor?"

"The Major—Major Van Horn! Oh, ma'am, he looked so—so—dead!"

Mrs. Van Horn started toward the stairs, then stopped, irresolute, turned around, and looked appealingly at the stolid-faced cook.

"I'm afraid!" she whispered. "I'm afraid to go up alone! Would you—would you mind coming with me?"

"Certainly not," replied the cook, mechanically untying her gingham apron and turning down her sleeves. "Likely as not it's just a fit. I've known lots who had 'em."

Molly rose, trying bravely to steady the quivering corners of her mouth.

"I'll go, too," she said. "Perhaps, as Katie says, it's only a fit—or at the worst—a stroke."

At the library door the three women hesitated, then Amelie Van Horn crossed the threshold, stopped, swept across the room and started to kneel beside her husband's prostrate form, but seeing the great dark spot, staggered back into Molly's outstretched arms.

"Lift up his head, somebody. Turn him over. He will suffocate."

Molly led Mrs. Van Horn to a chair, then motioned to Katie, who stood in the doorway, transfixed with horror.

"Bring some pillows, Katie," said Molly, practically, as she thrust her hands beneath Major Van Horn's shoulders. "Then help me."

They turned the body over as gently as possible. Then Molly lifted the Major's head and laid it upon two Persian floor pillows. "He is dead," she said, shuddering as her eyes took in the transparent blueness of the man's nostrils, the livid face and half-open eyes.

Amelie Van Horn, who had stood with averted face, her eyes covered with her hands, gasped at Molly's words, and sweeping forward clutched the girl by the shoulder.

"It can't be, Molly! It is impossible! Quick, telephone for a doctor! Call Dr. Winston—2000 Main. Please, Molly—somebody—hurry!"

Molly went to Major Van Horn's study, which was hardly more than a large alcove leading from the library, and sitting down at the desk took the receiver from its hook.

"Ask Dr. Winston to come to Major Van Horn's house at once," she said, after what seemed an interminable wait, while Central twice asked her to repeat the number. "Yes, Maj. Ritchie Van Horn's house on K street. At once, please!"

Molly hung up and went back to the library. Mrs. Van Horn was kneeling at her husband's head, her shoulders hunched forward, her eyes fixed on a round brass disk that rested on the left side of Major Van Horn's waistcoat.

"Molly, what is that?" she gasped, pointing to the round piece of metal with a trembling finger. "What—what is it?"

Molly bent and touched the disk gingerly with her forefinger. Between the dark waistcoat and the round brass surface there were several sheets of blood-stained paper. Molly tried to lift the disk, then shrank back.

"It is the bottom of his desk spindle," she whispered. "He has been stabbed with his desk spindle!" Her voice was intensely dramatic.

Mrs. Van Horn shuddered and covered her eyes with her hands.

"Take it out, Molly! I can't—I can't touch it!"

Molly stood up. Her face was like chalk and the seriousness of her eyes belied the merry, upturning corners of her mouth.

"We must leave it be, Mrs. Van Horn. I've heard and read many a time that you must leave a murdered man be until the police arrive. Maybe we oughtn't to have turned him over and put the pillows under him. We mustn't touch the spindle. We have to leave that be, don't we, Katie?"

She looked up at the broad-faced cook, who had slipped back to the door, and who, with blanched face and hands wrapped tightly in her skirt, stood staring dazedly at Mrs. Van Horn.

At Molly's words she started. "Yes, Mrs. Van Horn," she answered slowly. "You have to leave everything be until the coroner looks at the corpse." Her voice was husky and awestricken.

Mrs. Van Horn rose, and with fingers pressing her cheeks, backed toward the door, her horrified eyes fixed on the weighted brass base of the desk spindle. At the door she opened her mouth as if to say something. Then, suddenly, she turned toward Molly, throwing out her hands in an appealing gesture.

"Fred Colton!" she gasped. "Fred Colton—was he the only person who saw Major Van Horn last night?"

"Yes, ma'am. Leastwise he was the only person I let in."

Mrs. Van Horn began to sob hysterically. "And Fred Colton's dead—he's dead!" Her voice rang out strangely shrill in the silent room. She covered her face with her hands, rocking back and forth, then dropped them suddenly and turned appealingly to Molly as the jangle of the doorbell sounded thru the house.

A minute later the library door closed on the thin black back of Dr. Winston. Outside, in the hall, Molly Finnegan stood with clasped hands looking down at the top of the doctor's derby hat which rested on the hall table.

She had been bowled over by the suddenness of Major Van Horn's death, but she had regained her self-possession. Strange fires were burning behind her blue eyes. After five years of expectation, and Conan Doyle, opportunity was at last rapping at her door.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE shelf above the table in Molly Finnegan's room there was a row of books. These, with the exception of a single large, green-backed volume called "The Woman Beautiful," indicated the trend of Molly's mind. They were responsible for the dreamy expression in her eyes, the wistful twist of her pretty, corner-tilted mouth. Most of them were bound in worn paper covers, a few were dressed in gay cloth, but they were detective stories, one and all.

Now, while the doctor was closeted in the library below, Molly sat on the edge of her bed, a pasteboard bound notebook spread open on her knee. Across the virgin whiteness of the first page she had written in a careful, round hand, "My First Case."

Molly looked at the words, then sighed deeply, the tip of the pencil between her lips, a frown puckering her forehead.

"It'll all be solved before morning," she said aloud. "There isn't going to be a case."

She lowered her pencil, and as she did so the door opened and Mrs. Ritchie Van Horn entered the room and dropped into the leather armchair, humpy with broken springs, that stood by the window.

"Dr. Winston has sent for the coroner, and—" Mrs. Van Horn glanced apprehensively toward the door—"he is telephoning the chief of police." Her voice sank away.

"They always do that when there's been a murder," said Molly, in a matter-of-fact tone. "There'll be an inquest."

"Oh, Molly, I cannot face it!" moaned Amelie Van Horn, letting a thin piece of white pasteboard slip from her hands to her lap.

Molly bent and picked it up. It was Frederick Colton's card. Molly read it, then frowned and tore it into fragments.

"Mrs. Van Horn," she said, in a businesslike manner, "I think you and I had better have a frank talk. You are in trouble." She paused, sat down on the edge of her hammocky bed, leaned forward, and laid her hand on her mistress' knee. "You are thinking that it will look very black for you when it comes out that you met Colton right after he murdered your——"

"Molly!" Mrs. Van Horn grasped Molly's hand. Her eyes were wide and frightened, her mouth pressed into a hard line. "Don't use that word, don't!"

"You might as well get used to hearing it as soon as you can, Mrs. Van Horn," said Molly, dryly. "They'll use it at the inquest most likely. And Mr. Colton——"

"Molly, forget that name, I beseech of you! Forget that he called here last night! Do not smirch the memory of a man that is dead, Molly." She paused, studied the girl between narrowed lids. "Mr. Colton is dead. It was in all of the papers this morning——"

"I know," interrupted Molly. "He died of heart disease in the Knickerbocker restaurant, and they are looking for the woman in red. This is no time to break down, Mrs. Van Horn. You must control yourself, and together we will think out what can be done. In the first place we must not let it get out that you were at the Knickerbocker last evening. Did anybody whom you know see you going in or coming out?"

"No."

"How did you come home?" Molly's manner was distinctly patronizing.

"I walked—all but the last block. Then I took a cab."

Molly bit her under lip thoughtfully. "If we get rid of the red dress——"

Again Mrs. Van Horn clutched Molly's hand. "It is gone," she whispered. "It was in the box that you took to the express office this morning. I—" She hesitated, then went on, the words falling over each other, pellmell. "I was afraid that when Major Van Horn saw the papers describing the woman who was with Mr. Colton he would suspect that it was I. He would have made a scene, and so I sent the gown away. He had never seen it. I intended to deny ever having had such a dress."

"And now it is gone—it is already on its way to New York," exclaimed Molly, excitedly.

"Yes," went on Amelie Van Horn. "Save for you, Molly, nobody knows that it was I who was at the Knickerbocker with Mr. Colton last night—after he—no, no. I will not believe it altho—ah, surely he had sufficient provocation."

"What do you mean?" asked Molly.

Amelie Van Horn moaned and pressed her fingers against her eyes. Presently she spoke, sinking her voice to a husky whisper.

"You remember the dark scar on Major Van Horn's cheek?"

Molly nodded.

"Mr. Colton made it with his riding crop—years ago in Venice. Major Van Horn never forgave him, and when an opportunity came for revenge, he seized it eagerly. He had Mr. Colton in his power, he was determined to ruin him. And I—I went to the Knickerbocker restaurant to offer everything I had to Fred Colton—the best friend I have ever known. I wanted to save him. He—he refused my offer, Molly, and then when I pleaded with him and afterward wept, knowing that a woman's tears sometimes get her way, he rose and came to my side, placing his hand on my shoulder, as he used to do years ago before—before—oh, Molly, years ago I wronged him, humiliated him in the eyes of the whole world! And I wanted in some way to make it up to him. But it is too late now. He is dead. As I told you, he came to my side and laid his hand on my shoulder, caressingly, as he used to do. And then something happened. He seemed in sudden pain. He sank into his chair, his head in his arms. I tried to rouse him and when I could not, I grew frightened, thinking of what the Major would say if it came out that I was at the Knickerbocker restaurant with Fred Colton. I was in a panic of fear. I ran away. Oh, Molly, Molly! you understand, don't you? It would be terrible for me if it should come out that I, Mrs. Van Horn, was at the Knickerbocker restaurant with Fred Colton after—after he had, had—murdered my husband!"

She rocked back and forth, her hands clasped beneath her chin, her blue eyes, dark as wood violets, filled with tears.

"I think I understand perfectly, Mrs. Van Horn." Molly spoke practically, altho her romantic heart ached for her mistress. "I have forgotten the name of the man who called here last evening. But there is the doorbell."

She sprang to her feet, straightened her cap, perked her apron strings, and ran downstairs.

The doctor had already opened the door, when she reached the lower hall, and was showing a portly gentleman in a closely buttoned frock coat into the library.

"The coroner," ejaculated Molly, just as the doorbell rang again. She opened it to face a great hulk of a man, who she afterward learned was Jim Bellows, chief of the city detectives. With him was Wiley, his assistant, a small man whose sharp eyes searched Molly's face as if he expected to find the whole story of the Van Horn murder written in it.

Bellows questioned Molly for nearly an hour on what had taken place at the Van Horn house the evening before. Her story seemed simple and straightforward enough. She said that a young man had called at about eight o'clock. He was a stranger. Major Van Horn was expecting him, and she admitted him to the library without announcing him. He did not mention his name, merely asking for Major Van Horn. If he left a card it should be on the salver in the hall. She had not carried it in. Molly felt that she got around the question of the card very nicely. She was not asked if she had taken it to Mrs. Van Horn.

The young man had remained in the library with Major Van Horn until about nine o'clock, when he had left the house in a great hurry. His manner was disturbed. Altho the night had turned cold, he had not put on his overcoat. Molly thought that he and Major Van Horn had quarreled, as she had heard loud voices in the library when she went up to announce dinner to Mrs. Van Horn, who had eaten alone, Major Van Horn having dined at his club.

After dinner Mrs. Van Horn had gone to the opera without seeing her husband, who had left word that he did not wish to be interrupted. A taxicab had come for her. Molly did not know at what hour her mistress had returned. She had taken her latchkey with her.

Katie, the cook, was questioned briefly. She was excused after convincing the detectives that she had not been above the kitchen floor after four o'clock on the previous day, until she went to bed a few minutes after nine. She had heard nothing unusual during the evening.

Mr. Bellows was as considerate as possible when he questioned Mrs. Van Horn, whose testimony threw no new light on the murder. She had gone to hear "Parsifal" the evening before. She had gone alone, as Major Van Horn had an important engagement. She had left the opera before the finale. The air in the auditorium was close, and her head ached. She had reached home at about eleven, and had let herself in with her latchkey. The house was dark when she entered, save for the light in the hall. She hesitated before giving this testimony.

She had gone upstairs at once. Major Van Horn's bedroom door was closed. She supposed he had retired. She frequently went to the theater alone, as she and her husband lived independent lives. He spent his spare time at the Army and Navy Club, frequently dining there and playing whist in the evening. The three years of their married life had been harmonious. They had lived in Washington but six months. Before coming to Washington they had lived in the Philippines and at Ft. Leavenworth. They were married in Paris. She did not see Major Van Horn's caller on the evening before. She was not aware that he had an enemy.

While Mrs. Van Horn was giving her testimony Molly escorted Wiley, the chief's assistant, over the house. After searching every room from attic to cellar for possible clews, he returned to the library, and still under Molly's wing, made a second inspection of a porch that had been converted into a sun parlor, and that opened by French windows into both the library and the dining-room. Convinced that an entrance to the library had not been forced from the outside, by means of the sun parlor, he dismissed Molly, and stationed himself at the foot of the stairs in the hall to wait for Jim Bellows.

When, at about noon, Detective Bellows finished with Mrs. Van Horn, he thanked her suavely for the patience she had shown, apologized with Southern courtliness for having questioned her concerning her personal affairs, cleared his throat twice, and then asked with a show of nervousness if it would be too much trouble for her to let him see the gown she had worn at the opera the evening before.

Amelie Van Horn swayed a little as she rose from her chair, grasped the table top, and rang for Molly Finnegan.

The maid answered the summons immediately, her eyes springing open questioningly as she noted her mistress' blanched face, the tense line of her lips.

"Molly," said Mrs. Van Horn, "Captain Bellows wishes to see the gown I wore at the opera last evening. Will you bring it, please?"

This capital story will be continued in the next issue of the Ledger. During the coming months many great stories will appear in these columns. If you are not already a subscriber for this paper, it will repay you to send in a year's subscription. It costs you only $1.00, and you will never regret it. Let us hear from you at once.

* * *

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Apropos of a young girl's rich marriage, Mayor Rockwell said at a reception in Akron:

"Our girls don't marry disadvantageously as often as our boys do. In the whirl of love the female doesn't seem to get as dizzy as the male.

"A pretty girl told me the other day that she was engaged to a very rich landowner.

"'Well, well,' I said, 'and here we all thought you'd marry the eloquent young preacher who took you about so much last summer.'

The girl smiled.

"'Deeds speak louder than words,' she said."

* * *

A GOOD CHANGE

A Change of Food Works Wonders.

Wrong food and drink cause a lot of trouble in this world. To change is first aid when a person is ill, particularly from stomach and nervous troubles. As an illustration: A lady in Mo. was brought around to health again by leaving off coffee and some articles of food that did not agree with her.

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"For a number of years I suffered with stomach and bowel trouble which kept getting worse until I was ill most of the time. About four years ago I left off coffee and began using Postum. My stomach and bowels improved right along, but I was so reduced in flesh and so nervous that the least thing would overcome me.

"Then I changed my food and began using Grape-Nuts in addition to Postum. I lived on these two principally for about four months. Day by day I gained in flesh and strength until the nervous trouble had disappeared. I feel that I owe my health to Postum and Grape-Nuts.

"Husband was troubled, for a long time, with occasional cramps, and slept badly. Finally I prevailed upon him to leave off coffee and take Postum. After he tried Postum for a few days he found that he could sleep and that his cramps disappeared. He never went back to coffee." Name given by Postum Co., Battle Creek, Mich.

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CHAPTER VIII.

BUT suddenly I doubted. Was it a clever ruse, this advent of the telegram so aptly timed? Was she a consummate actress, confident of her dupe? No; the agony the message had caused her was undoubtedly genuine. When she looked at me, it was with eyes heavy with despair. When at last she spoke, her eyes burned fiercely, her voice was harsh with anger. The words she uttered were certainly not addressed to me. They were spoken rather in spite of my presence than because of it.

"Look! I staked all in one throw! I lose all—in a moment. I hold in my clenched hands the liberty and happiness of ten thousand women and children. And then a cursed fate strikes from my grasp this priceless happiness. My poor people, my poor people! Again I fail you; I betray you!"

She stared at me with eyes that did not see. Her small hands pressed her temples convulsively.

"Perhaps, madam, it is Fate, also, who has sent me to you now, to help you."

"Perhaps," she said heavily, scarcely listening.

Then suddenly an expression, quite merciless, distorted her features. Her pupils dilated in her fierce excitement. She studied my face critically, coldly deliberate. There was something portentous, almost ominous, in this cool stare. It disconcerted me; it made me already regret my proffer of friendship. She smiled; but the smile was Medusa-like.

"Yes, I believe it. Fate has sent you to me. And you—are you willing to follow where Fate leads?"

"Why not?" I demanded, with more curiosity than sincerity, I confess.

"Ah, you are courageous enough for that? Monsieur, you are a bold man."

"Surely not so bold as you, madam, in asking courage of a man who has been disgraced for cowardice." It was difficult to keep the sneer out of my voice.

"I know to whom I speak, my dear monsieur. The task I would set you demands not the brute courage of the fool, but the devotion of a crusader. It is a sacred cause; its servants are not easily found."

"I am flattered that I fulfill the requirements so admirably," I returned cynically. "But you will find it difficult to convince me that my extraordinary courage and devotion to a good cause make my services invaluable. Why should you choose me from a score of men to help you?"

"You are right. Above all things we must be frank with each other. You are at the Schweitzerhof? Au revoir, you will hear from me soon."

I bowed over the hand she held languidly toward me. I was embarked on an adventure. Where would it lead me?

I returned to my hotel soberly enough. I had told my little allegory lightly. Now I asked myself if I should not apply it seriously to myself. Only this morning I had mapped out for myself a clear path to be followed. And already was a siren beckoning? Already was I enchanted?

I was intensely irritated that I should have allowed myself to be interested by this Sophie de Varnier. For the past hour I had been playing dangerously near the fire. It had not yet burned me; but could I honestly say that it had not warmed, intoxicated, allured? I had pledged myself to nothing, it is true. Very well, I must be careful not to compromise myself in the future.

Two women had met me at the parting of the ways.

One of them had set me a task, holding herself proudly aloof, promising nothing. If this task were actually accomplished, the reward was to be the deed itself.

And now another woman had come—radiant, glittering, a subtle perfume lulling the senses. Her wild beauty, her charm, had been frankly displayed to enthrall me. She had promised a definite adventure. As to the reward, it seemed to me too brazenly obvious.

I flicked the ash angrily from my cigarette. And was I really tempted? Hardly, I resolved savagely. And yet I was not fool enough to be blind to the fact that the situation was not without its danger.

My shoulder was tapped. I was seated in the vestibule of my hotel. I looked up, startled. A well-groomed man in the early thirties towered over me, an American I saw at once. The round, jocund face was vaguely familiar.

"Yes," exclaimed a burly voice, "it is really old Haddon."

I grasped the hand he held toward me with emotion. Here was a friend, an American, and I needed a friend badly just now.

I had not seen Locke since we were at college together. We had never been intimate, but the bighearted Robinson Locke had been a character among his classmates.

At first I hesitated to respond to his cordial greeting; I was afraid he had not heard my story. But presently he plunged into the episode that had made me notorious for a day. Then I knew he had come to stand by me.

"It is a brutal lie, of course," he stormed indignantly, "but even if it were true——" He clapped my shoulder.

"It is true—at least in a measure."

"Rot!" he exclaimed, with cheerful skepticism, lowering his person into the yielding expanse of an armchair by my side. "Tell me about it."

"Unless you insist, I prefer not," I said quietly, beckoning a waiter. "It was just a horrible accident. Frankly, to have saved his life was impossible. But I might have died with him. I didn't. There you have my disgrace in a nutshell."

He looked somewhat glum at this cold-blooded explanation, and stirred uneasily in his chair. I watched him, not without a grim amusement. He pulled at his cigar, searching my face keenly.

"Rot!" he cried again, and this time with conviction. "If you feel any disgrace, it is your own fault, Haddon. If you were the coward they say you are, you wouldn't sit there smiling at me. You would rave and swear by all the gods that you were innocent. I don't want to hear your story. But I want you to know that you have one friend from home to stick up for you, and to believe in you."

I was too moved to speak.

"That's all right, then," he said with gruff gentleness. "It must be hell to be over here alone and everybody kicking you."

"Oh, that was to be expected, of course! But last night I had an experience that I wouldn't go thru again if I could help it."

"Do you mind telling me what it was?"

"Willoughby, the man who was killed, loved a Miss Brett. She was at this hotel last night with her mother. They heard of my being here, and did me the honor to send for me, and to ask from me the details of the tragedy."

Locke's heavy face was agitated equally by sympathy and surprise.

"Miss Brett!" he cried. "That must be the sister of Sir Mortimer Brett."

"You know her?" I demanded eagerly.

"I have never seen her, but I know something of Sir Mortimer. He is the most picturesque figure in the English diplomatic service."

"Why picturesque? That is a strange adjective to describe a British minister. Who is he, and how do you happen to know of him?"

"He is consul general and minister plenipotentiary at Sofia, Bulgaria. There is not an attache in Europe today who has not an inquisitive eye cocked at Sir Mortimer Brett."

"And his claims to distinction?"

"Two only, my dear fellow, but they are sufficient to make any man notorious. First of all, scandal has been busy with his illustrious name. However, I am afraid that's a very ordinary sort of notoriety. But when I tell you the sober fact that if he just winked war would break out in the Balkan Peninsula you will grant that he is a factor in the game of European politics."

"I have heard enough to have my curiosity excited. Tell me more of the man who controls the destiny of a nation. The scandal, for instance. Is it a matter of common newspaper publicity? I have figured in the papers myself lately, and I feel a certain sympathy for a fellow-sufferer."

"Oh, the newspapers have made him squirm a bit, no doubt. But my sources of information are more accurate than mere newspaper gossip. You see I happen to be the American consul here."

"Then your gossip of the embassies ought to be worth listening to."

I settled myself in my chair and lighted a fresh cigarette.

"My dear chap, you are asking too much of me—really you are! The situation in the Balkans! Good Lord, that's too appalling a subject to be discussed between two friends who have just met."

"Locke," I replied diplomatically, "I suppose you wish to discuss me and my unfortunate affair. Well, I don't. If you wish to show me that you believe me not quite so black as I am painted, ignore the matter completely."

"Of course, of course," he hastened to assure me. "And you really wish to understand why war would break out tomorrow in the Balkans if Sir Mortimer Brett lifted his little finger?"

"If such a knowledge is the prelude to the scandal that concerns him."

"Very well," he agreed good-na-

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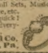

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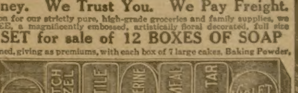

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turedly. "But don't despair if you are still muddled after ten minutes' talk on Balkan politics; Count von Bulow has said that the man who comprehends the situation in the Balkan States does not exist. But to understand how Sir Mortimer's influence may plunge Europe into war today, just as surely as when Madame de Pompadour twisted Louis XV. about her little finger, you must know something of the trouble that seethes and bubbles in Turkish-Macedonia."

"Even the word Turkish-Macedonia is a mere geography name to me."

"Hang it, have I got to give you a lesson in geography as well as in history?" growled Locke. "Well, Macedonia is actually no state or county. It is simply a term to designate a strip of Turkish territory immediately to the south of Bulgaria. It is with independent Bulgaria and insurgent Macedonia that our friend Sir Mortimer Brett is concerned. In a word, the situation is this: Bulgaria, long freed from the Turkish yoke, would help struggling Macedonia to gain her freedom.

"Macedonia itself is an extraordinary hodgepodge of races—Greeks, Turks, Serbs, Bosnians, Bulgars—there are a dozen dirty little races, and half a dozen fanatic sects all ready to fly at each other's throats, if they were not too busy struggling for their freedom. But Greek, Catholic, Jew, they are all ready to die cheerfully if they can down their Turkish oppressor. It is just this sublime struggle for freedom that gives a touch of nobility to mongrel, snarling, snapping Macedonia. These Macedonians for years have been putting up one of the pluckiest running fights imaginable. The House of Commons indulges in solemn piffle about what they choose to call the Balance of Criminality. In other words, they profess to think that the atrocities committed by the Turks and the Macedonians are equally horrible. But, as a matter of fact, English knowledge of Macedonian affairs is doled out by the London Times, which in turn gets its facts from the English embassy at Constantinople, professedly pro-Turkish in its sympathies."

"How do you account for that?" I demanded with a show of interest. Locke's lecture was not thrilling, but I listened patiently; for I realized that his information was necessary if I would understand Sir Mortimer's predicament.

"The missionaries," continued Locke, "know only too well that the unspeakable Turk is an even greater scoundrel than Mr. Gladstone chose to believe him. But the Foreign Office, you will understand, does not intend to risk the peace of Europe because the missionaries rave about the outraging and slaughter of a few thousands of Macedonian women and children.

"For several years they have continued a guerrilla warfare—if you can dignify the dynamiting of a railroad or a bridge and the stealthy slaughter of unarmed bands as warfare. The Macedonian campaign has been managed by a body of men who have their headquarters at Sofia in Bulgaria.

"They fight in bands. Their arms are hidden in the fields or in the caves of the mountains. When a Turkish host surrounds one of these bands it finds peaceful peasants herding their sheep on the hills or tilling their fields."

"Such a hopeless struggle as this might continue for years," I interrupted. "Where does Bulgaria come in?"

"Bulgaria comes in right here with a flourish of trumpets, and Prince Ferdinand is at the head of the procession.

"Actually Bulgaria is independent; nominally, Ferdinand does fealty to the Sultan, and at the same time is under the thumb of Russia. He is a petty princeling with as inordinate a sense of his own importance as a cannibal king in a top-hat. He has surrounded himself with more state than a czar or a kaiser. Ferdinand's great ambition is to be crowned king. Now he only rejoices in the title of prince. He has vainly implored his great master Russia's permission to assume that title, but Czar Nicholas prefers that little Ferdinand be humble. 'Then if you won't let me be King,' says Ferdinand, 'I won't play with you any more.' So Master Ferdinand is most anxious to exchange the doubtful friendship of Russia for a more indulgent protector. He has decided that he would like England to be that protector."

"But what has this to do with Bulgaria's going to the assistance of Macedonia?" I exclaimed impatiently.

"Simply this: Ferdinand knows that before he dare assume the title of king, he must make himself more popular with his subjects than he is at present. Macedonia affords a convenient means of accomplishing this. But before he flings his army into Macedonian territory, he must be sure that he will have a free hand. Let England once assure him of her moral support, and Ferdinand will invade Macedonia tomorrow."

"It is at this juncture, I suppose, that Sir Mortimer Brett, consul general and minister plenipotentiary, holds the center of the stage?"

"Yes, it is about his diplomatic head that the elements rage. But a Jewish banker of New York City runs him a close second in importance."

"A remarkable statement, that."

"And this little Jew is a remarkable man. A Macedonian by birth, he has made five score of millions in America. But he remembers his country in the time of her need. It is he who offers to clothe, arm, and feed the Bulgarian army, if it fights for the freedom of his race. His one condition is this: The invasion must have a reasonably sure chance of success. That is assured, he thinks, when England agrees to stand behind Bulgaria."

"And the name of this Jewish banker?"

"Otto Kuhn. One must not forget him."

CHAPTER IX.

WE ARE now ready for the extraordinary episode of Sir Mortimer Brett," Locke resumed. "I think you will find that the narrative grows more interesting."

"I trust so," I yawned.

"Sir Mortimer is a comparatively young man, I understand. But he has already had fifteen years to his experience as a diplomatist. He has been trusted implicitly by the British Foreign Office. He has been nothing less than a dictator in Bulgarian affairs, so far as England is concerned. There have been repeated attempts to bribe him. But he has been strong enough to resist all pressure—whether it be exerted by the Sultan or by Ferdinand. But after an unblemished record of fifteen years this Bayard in politics has fallen a victim to a vulgar intrigue with a political adventuress.

"The Countess Sarahoff is the adventuress—a woman of marvelous charm and beauty. It is said she is the friend of Prince Ferdinand; perhaps it is he who first incited her to entice Sir Mortimer from the path of rectitude. Certain it is that she has been successful in bringing Sir Mortimer supinely to his knees before her, if the gossip of the embassies is to be believed.

"Now I can give you the situation in a nutshell. If Sir Mortimer is recalled, it is all up with Macedonia so far as immediate help from Bulgaria is concerned. Sir Mortimer's successor as consul general will certainly be the present vice consul, and he is known to be strongly adverse to the Macedonian cause. Our Jewish banker will refuse his loan to Ferdinand; Ferdinand will be unable and unwilling to subsidize an army; Macedonia's struggle will come to nothing for the present."

"This banker must have remarkable faith in Sir Mortimer," I suggested, "to think that he can influence the British Foreign Office when his reputation is already tottering."

"My dear Haddon, I have been letting you behind the scenes. Our banker friend in all probability has no inkling of Sir Mortimer's impending fall. There is nothing to damn a man politically because he is in love with a woman. It is true that there have been innuendoes in plenty in the papers. But who believes the papers?"

"And a king's messenger has already been sent to Sofia to demand Sir Mortimer's recall?" I asked thoughtfully.

"So they say, and now I come to a really humorous phase of this episode of Sir Mortimer Brett. When the king's messenger arrives at Sofia he will be unable to deliver his dispatches; he will find that his bird has flown."

"What! Sir Mortimer has left his post, and with this woman?"

"Less than a week ago Sir Mortimer was seen with the Countess Sarahoff here in Lucerne. He had left Sofia suddenly under the plea of sickness, whether real or assumed. And now he has disappeared again from here, and has left absolutely no trace of his whereabouts."

"So that when the king's messenger comes here he will still be unable to deliver his dispatches. As you say, it is an extraordinary state of affairs. I suppose that Sir Mortimer continues to be a properly credited ambassador until he receives those dispatches?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And in the meanwhile there is a hue and cry for him?"

"My dear fellow, I have told you repeatedly that you are behind the scenes. Ostensibly Sir Mortimer has gone to the mountains for his health. But the arrival here in Lucerne of the mother and daughter is significant."

"They come to rescue him from the influence of this Countess Sarahoff, of course. But if she has disappeared with Sir Mortimer——"

"I saw you flirting with her at the kursaal about an hour ago," said Locke, smiling at me grimly.

CHAPTER X.

I HAD raised my glass carelessly to my lips. I placed it slowly on the table. I met Locke's steady gaze not merely in surprise, rather in complete conviction. That was precisely the kind of woman I had determined she must be. But I had no intention of discussing her with Locke. A plan was already seething in my brain—a plan infinitely more thrilling than rescuing a comrade in the battlefield or a traveler lost in the mountainside. I intended to keep that plan to myself. In the meanwhile I must have further details of this escapade of the missing ambassador.

"We will speak of the Countess Sarahoff presently," I said, returning his smile coolly. "But tell me, why should England adopt the slow and clumsy expedient of sending a king's messenger, as you call him, across Europe, instead of demanding the instant recall of the minister by cable? That is my first question, and my second is this: Are you, my dear Locke, in the secret councils of the British Foreign Office that you know so much of their plans?"

"A king's messenger," drawled Locke, "is supposed to have a brain between his shoulders and to exercise his discretion. The Foreign Office would wish to be quite sure that the scandal was not a clever ruse of a secret agent of Russia or Turkey. Even if the scandal exists, there might be mitigating circumstances."

"You wish me to infer that this king's messenger is given discretionary powers of delivering or withholding his dispatch? But how do you know that? That brings me to the second question."

"My dear chap, I can put two and two together, can't I? I can see a church door, as Benedict said, when I am standing in front of it."

"Oh, then, you are simply guessing," I cried, disgusted.

Locke spread the tips of his fingers together, and regarded me humorously. "You forget I am consul at Lucerne? I, sir, am a personage."

"Rubbish!" I exclaimed brusquely. "American consuls are not as a rule deeply in the confidence of the ministers in Downing Street."

Locke laughed, looked about him cautiously, then whispered:

"It's something of a secret, Haddon. Before I was consul at Lucerne I was a newspaper man. Yes; don't look shocked. I am not averse to eking out the magnificent income allowed me by the United States Government by sending a budget of news occasionally to my old chief."

"I understand; you newspaper men are ubiquitous. Before the mysterious knowledge of the press I am silent."

"I need hardly say that what I have told you is strictly between ourselves."

"Of course."

"So far I have not breathed a word of this extraordinary story. I wish to make a grand coup. I am waiting for the finale of the story—the dramatic and perhaps tragic denouement. For the end is not yet."

So saying, Locke produced his pocketbook. From its voluminous folds he extracted an envelope. He held it toward me in silence. I took it curiously. It bore an unfamiliar stamp.

"It is the stamp in the corner I wish you to examine carefully. In ten years a collector will pay a pretty penny for this stamp. Already it is as rare as strawberries in January. It was issued less than a month ago to mark the anniversary of Ferdinand's succession to the throne. Yes, it is his likeness and that of his son you are looking at. But Ferdinand would pay half a million francs if he could buy up and destroy that issue of stamps. In Bulgaria that is a simple matter. His secret agents are on the lookout in every capital of Europe. But you see they are not wholly successful."

As Locke had suggested, I looked critically at this double stamp which had caused Ferdinand so much anxiety. Two heads were depicted. They were placed side by side, a man of middle age and a handsome boy. It appeared to me a rather ordinary sort of stamp.

"Hold it upside down," commanded Locke impatiently. "Cover the left-hand corner with your hand, so. Now, do you see that a portion of the heads of the father and son makes an unmistakable death-mask? And the death-mask is that of Prince Ferdinand."

Looked at in this manner the ghastly portent was vividly suggested. The nostrils of the two heads together formed the eyes of the death-mask; the mustache of the father made the eyebrows; and the brow and the eyes of the boy prince formed the nose and mouth. And more horrible than the death-mask itself was a wound in the temple, from which flowed a streak of blood.

"This wound," I asked, shuddering, "is it merely a coincidence? The look of agony—the staring eyes—is that meant to be a menace, a threat of a violent death?"

"Can you doubt it?" demanded Locke, replacing the envelope carefully in his pocketbook. "That death-mask is regarded by a large portion of Ferdinand's dissatisfied subjects as a 'heavenly sign.' That little stamp, I venture to say, is a death-knell for Ferdinand—it introduces into Bulgarian politics an awful and solemn note."

"A 'heavenly sign'?" I asked, shuddering again. "But he still lives?"

"Yes; at present he is in Paris. I suppose he is safe there. But when he returns to his capital at Sofia——"

"And the woman—this Countess Sarahoff, is she one of the revolutionaries who regard that stamp as a 'heavenly sign'? You told me that she was supposed to be the friend of Prince Ferdinand."

"I did. But is she? She is a woman of mystery. Is she really in earnest in seeking to entrap Sir Mortimer into influencing England to stand behind Bulgaria in her invasion of Turkish Mace-

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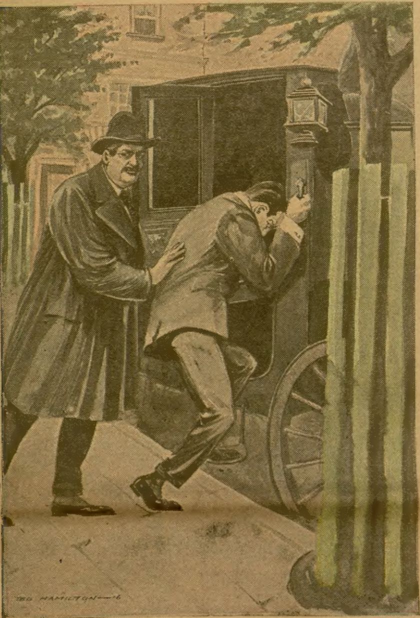

I lurched clumsily into the vehicle.

donia? Is she ignorant of the existence or at least the significance of this stamp? Or, posing as a friend of Ferdinand, having ready access to him at any hour, will hers be the dagger plunged into his breast at the fatal hour? Perhaps Sir Mortimer is not the guileless victim we think him to be. Perhaps the king's messenger does not have two sets of dispatches to be presented at his discretion. Perhaps this death-mask is a ghastly accident and not a menace. Perhaps the Countess Sarahoff, alias Sophie de Varnier, is a lamb of innocence. Perhaps! But, my dear chap, don't trust that 'perhaps.'"

Locke rose and pulled on his gloves. I stared at him in sudden comprehension.

"I understand now. You had more than one object in coming to see me this morning," I said soberly.

He lit a cigarette, looking down at me in deep thought.

"In America the game of politics is a fair game and above board. We show our cards; they are on the table for all the world to see. The very frankness of our methods puzzles the diplomats of Europe. Here in Europe things are managed differently. There are wheels within wheels. No pawn is too insignificant to be made use of. This pawn may be a simple citizen, even a tourist——"

I shook the hand he held toward me, and retained it, bewildered.

"But that is absurd on the face of it. In what possible way could I be of use to this Countess Sarahoff?"

Locke shrugged his shoulders carelessly, and blew a ring of smoke with precision at the chandelier.

"Nothing is quite absurd," he returned calmly. "Two days ago I read of an unfortunate accident of a fellow-countryman and an old college acquaintance. Today I am surprised to find this countryman of mine on excellent terms with a woman whom I have every reason to believe is a dangerous adventuress. I come to see my fellow-countryman, to offer him my sympathy. I remain to warn him."

"But why?" I demanded, still skeptical.

"There are three facts that should make you think, Haddon. First of all, you have made the acquaintance of the mother and the sister of Sir Mortimer Brett. Secondly, the Countess Sarahoff has made your acquaintance. Thirdly—contradict me if I am wrong—she has already interested you; more than that, I venture to say that you have made an appointment with her."

He looked at me keenly. I was silent.

"These, my dear Haddon, are simple facts. Perhaps there is no relation between them. Again I say, 'perhaps.' But don't let the mysterious machinery of intrigue catch you in its meshes. Its wheels may crush you. You have had enough trouble, and look out for the Countess Sarahoff."

"I shall try to remember your advice," I said, struggling to control my excitement, and placed his visiting card in my pocket. "Yes; I shall see you again before I leave Lucerne."

"Oh, suit yourself about that," said Locke, coldly.

Not until afterwards did it occur to me that I had treated him rather cavalierly—indeed, laid myself open to suspicion by my silence.

CHAPTER XI.

I STOOD quite still after Locke had left me, lost in thought.

A life for a life, Helena had said. But is not honor sometimes dearer than life itself? At least the honor of a loved brother.

That I could exert any influence over the mind and actions of a man as famous in affairs as Sir Mortimer Brett was absurd. Even had that been possible Helena would have been the last to intrust his honor in my hands. And yet, as Locke had said, what if I were a pawn in the game of the Countess Sarahoff?

Then why not be an intelligent pawn, to be moved if you will, carelessly here and there in the game of intrigue, but to be moved with my eyes open?

"No pawn is too insignificant to be made use of;" those were Locke's words. He had believed that she would attempt to make use of me. Heaven grant it, I thought, with a thrill of hope. We should then see what we should see. Yes; I would look out for the Countess Sarahoff. But scarcely in the manner Locke had suggested.

Early in the afternoon a message came from her, as I had felt confident it would. A cousin was with her; they were to leave Lucerne that evening, en route to a little village in the Bernese Alps, where she had taken a chateau for the summer. She would be charmed if I would dine with them in her apartment at the Hotel Nationale. And would I pardon the absurd hour of six-thirty? I was to come in my morning clothes, since neither she nor her cousin expected to dress.

I accepted the invitation with alacrity. That meant privacy—a certain intimacy. A cousin was to be there, it was true. But the presence of the cousin was, of course, a sop carelessly thrown at Mrs. Grundy.

The cousin had not arrived when I presented myself that evening. I struggled against a sense of shame. I was accepting her hospitality, and I had come to spy on her. But I reassured myself with the conviction that it was to be a game of tit-for-tat.

The apartment de luxe into which I was ushered was dimly lighted, and the air was heavy with the perfume of flowers. In the center of the room the white damask and silver of a table set for dinner gleamed under the soft light of candles. In some vague way, this room, one of a hundred others in the hotel, had lost something of its stiff formalism. It had charm. Charm! That was the word that best described this mysterious woman. Well, I must steel myself against that charm.

She had been beautiful the evening before; this evening she was radiant. Her eyes burned with a fire that at once disconcerted and excited. She was the incarnation of what one calls the joy of living. Never for an instant was she still. Now it was to glance critically at the admirably set table; now to rearrange the flowers. Presently she moved to the window, and drew back the heavy brocade hanging, looking at me over her shoulder.

"Why does my cousin not come?" she demanded petulantly. "At eleven tonight we go to Vitznau by the boat. Before the birds awake tomorrow we must be off—up, up, up the mountains to my chateau. It will break my heart if we are delayed."

"Your chateau has great attraction for you," I said, smiling.

She came toward me impulsively, her hands clasped.

"Oh, you would like my chateau, monsieur. It is strong and rugged; and so high that to see its towers thru the branches of the pine trees, as you climb the hillside, it seems a dream, a fantasy. And below, very far below, there is the noisy little river that rushes around its base, and an adorable village that crouches close to it for protection. And within, there are great shadowy rooms with gleaming bare floors and tapestries. Oh, yes, and there is my beloved piano. When the thunder rolls terribly over the lonely mountains, and the storm beats against the curtained windows, and the fire of huge logs in the hearth does not reach the somber corners—oh, it is then that I live. I am inspired. In the night the passionate soul of Chopin speaks to me. And in the morning when the sun is shining again, and the little river is gay and turbulent, there are my flowers and my books and my poor. And there is peace. My castle is a Castle of Indolence, and it is a Castle of Happiness."

"That is the castle we are all looking for," I said wistfully.

She moved restlessly to the piano. She struck the opening chords of that prelude of Chopin which is at once a suggestion of a funeral march and a procession in a cathedral. I watched her, fascinated, tho I had sworn I would not be fascinated by her.

She stopped abruptly in the midst of a phrase. Her white arms dropped to

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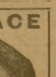

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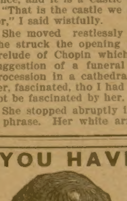

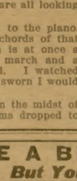

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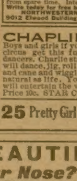

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her lap. She looked over toward me. Then she leaned her elbows on the keys; she nodded to me, half in entreaty, half in command. I stood opposite her, leaning toward her, across the piano.

"But sometimes I am lonely in my chateau," she said in a low voice. "Come with Dr. Starva and myself. Be our guest, Mr. Haddon."

I started. A man! I had not counted on that. I had known this was to be an evening of surprises. I had schooled myself to meet them without wonder. But this invitation, so strangely and so unexpectedly given, completely astonished me. Who was this convenient cousin, this Dr. Starva?

The chance I had expected had come. To accept such an invitation as a matter of course, however, would be too absurd.

"You give invitations to all the world?" I asked ungraciously.

"No, monsieur, only to those who interest me, and who——"

"Are of use to you?" I asked indiscreetly.

She looked at me with cool, level eyes, still playing. "Absolutely."

"And in what way do I happen to be of use to you, Madame de Varnier?"

She smiled mysteriously, shaking her head.

"That is a secret."

"I detest secrets," I said irritably.

"But if the secret were a condition?"

"Then I should probably refuse. I do not accept invitations when there are conditions attached to them."

"Then if I say it is because I like you?"

"I should not believe you."

"Then perhaps I am sorry for you. You are unhappy. I will take you to my chateau to find happiness."

"Come, Madame de Varnier, let us stop fencing. Why did you speak to me last night? Why do you pretend to be interested in me—so interested that you ask me, an utter stranger, to visit your chateau? Do you remember my story of yesterday? Am I to think, do you wish me to think——"

She looked at me intently, very pale. Her lips were trembling, and yet she smiled—a smile mysterious, tragic, pitiful.

"Monsieur, I am not a young girl. I am a woman of the world. Fate has called to me. I must follow; I must meet my destiny; sometimes I must walk in the dark places. The world, your world, let it think what it will! Bah, it is not my concern what it thinks of me. Perhaps last night, this morning, I wished you to fall in love with me. Perhaps now I am asking you to give me a little respect, a very little, monsieur. But what does it matter?"

I looked at this strange woman in astonishment. It was a curious plea. Perhaps she had wished to make me fall in love with her! She made the frank confession with a childish naivete. And in the same breath she asked for my respect!

"You speak in riddles," I exclaimed petulantly. "Tell me your purpose."

She looked up at me swiftly, half in defiance.

"Tell me yours."

"My purpose!" I cried. "I have none."

A moment she scanned my face keenly. Apparently she was satisfied that I spoke the truth. But that she should have even a glimmer of a suspicion was startling.

"Look, my friend, I speak no more in riddles, but very frankly. Come to my chateau because there you can do me a service, a great service. Voila, I have told you everything."

"Not quite everything," I replied quietly. "You have not told me, for instance, the nature of the service that you ask of the first stranger you meet."

"When you are my guest I shall tell you," she promised airily.

She plunged into a stormy mazurka to drown my protestations. I watched her, irritated and yet half yielding, as she played with the brilliancy and elan of a virtuoso. Then I walked to a window.

To reach it, I passed a pier-glass paneled in the wall. A man's face was dimly reflected there. Tho I did not look, I knew that he must be standing behind a door leading into another apartment. He had been listening, of course.

I did not betray my surprise. I stepped out on the balcony, looking down on the street below.

This incident banished my last shred of reluctance. These adventurers spied on me; it was equally fair that I play their game. Yes; I determined to meet them with their own weapons.

The music reached a stormy climax. There was silence. I did not go back into the room. I waited curiously. Would she again insist? If so, I determined to no longer refuse.

The heavy curtains at the window were parted. She stood beside me. Again I noticed the feverish light in her eyes; her bosom rose and fell tumultuously; her color came and went.

"Then you have no liking for an adventure?" she demanded in a spirit of desperate gayety. "Even when that adventure is to be shared with a woman—yes, a beautiful woman?"

"Not when adventures are thrust on me," I replied coldly. Her emotion repelled me.

"Ah, you persist in being ungracious. Then say this adventure brings happiness for yourself."

"I should require proof of that."

She saw that I was not to be won over by coquetry. She became serious, almost anxious. Instinctively I felt that she was about to play her last card. Had she known it, I was already decided. But she was ignorant of that, and risked everything to gain her purpose.

"You have set yourself a task. What if I can help you fulfill it?"

"Again you speak in riddles, madam."

"If I said I were listening last night!"

I frowned on her, furious, but I did not answer.

She felt no shame in making this confession. One hand rested upon her hip, with the other she snapped finger and thumb.

"My dear monsieur, you are not attractive when you look like that. Even I have heard the English proverb, 'All is fair in love and in war.'"

"And since this is not love, you wish me to infer that it is war? And you ask the enemy deliberately into the camp?"

"It is neither love nor war. It is a truce. Does that satisfy you?"

"Until you tell me the service I am to do you, it must be an armed truce," I interposed cautiously.

I emphasized the adjective.

"Bien! At Alterhoffen you shall know all. Then it will be for you to decide if we are to be allies."

"Very well," I assented briskly. "I will go to your chateau with you. When do we start?"

Now that I had made my decision she grasped the railing of the balcony, exhausted. Presently I noticed that her lips were moving; and as I looked at her in wonder, I saw her furtively make the sign of the cross. When she spoke again, it was languidly, as with an effort.

"Dr. Starva and myself are to go tonight to Vitznau, a little town on Lake Lucerne, an hour's journey from here. Tomorrow morning at the dawn we drive en diligence to Alterhoffen."

"Is it necessary that I go to Vitznau?"

"Yes," she said hesitatingly, averting her eyes. "The last boat leaves Lucerne at eleven. Your luggage, can it be ready then?"

I nodded absently.

An immense man stood stiffly at the window awaiting us. His bearing was slovenly, as was his attire. The spectacles and the puffy face, unnaturally pale, suggested the habits of the student. But the eyes, small, crafty, and very bright, instantly corrected my first impression, and left me baffled and vaguely distrustful. It was the man whose reflection I had seen in the pier-glass.

"Ah, my cousin at last! Georges, this is Mr. Haddon, an American. He comes to the chateau at Alterhoffen as our guest."

It was impossible to doubt that he had spied on me with Madame de Varnier's consent. But I was certain that he heard of my consent to go to Alterhoffen with positive annoyance. I was not blind to the significant look that passed between them; the eyes of Madame de Varnier dilating in triumph and defiance; Dr. Starva equally defiant and sullen.

Evidently there was discord in the camp. Dr. Starva did not welcome the fly that had consented to walk into the web. Well, so much the better. A little discord might prove useful.

"Madam is an admirable host," Dr. Starva said slowly in French. "But if the guest is to be quite happy he must

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be content to amuse himself as madam wishes."

The words were almost a threat. I looked with repulsion at this pale, flabby, shuffling giant. It would be well to be on my guard against him. He might be dangerous. But half the battle was won in realizing that.

Madame de Varnier met his bold sally, insolently careless.

"Dinner, messieurs," she cried gayly; and took my arm, leaving the huge Dr. Starva to follow.

CHAPTER XII.

THREE hours later Dr. Starva and myself were on the little steamboat en route for Vitznau, a journey of an hour. I had met him at the quay; he was alone. Madame de Varnier, he coolly informed me, had taken an earlier boat. I was not to see her until next morning.

Frankly, I scarcely liked that. I could have wished for a more congenial companion. However, I was embarked on an adventure, and must take things as they came. It was to be a game of give and take. I was deliberately permitting myself to be their tool for the moment; I was to serve their purpose. My wages for this service were to be the opportunity of finding Sir Mortimer Brett. Until I had penetrated the mystery of his disappearance I would be as clay in their hands. Perhaps it might be necessary to be their partner for the nonce in their intrigues. They might wonder at my docility and guilelessness, but they should not question it. That was the delicate task I must bend myself to for the present.

We had seated ourselves well forward and were quite alone, for at this late hour the boat carried few passengers. The wind coming from the snow-clad peaks was piercing. I shivered, but rather from excitement than from the chilly air. Already the lights of Vitznau could be seen dimly thru the thick mists.

Dr. Starva, rolling a huge cigar in the corner of his loose, sensual mouth, regarded me fixedly under shaggy eyebrows.

"It it cold. We must have some cognac." Without waiting for my assent he summoned a waiter.

Even in so trivial a matter as the appropriateness of refreshments his tone was more a command than an invitation. The cognac would be welcome enough, but one less observing than myself might have noticed the alacrity with which he welcomed the excuse for the liquor.

"Do you know what it is to have a headache?" he asked, and, fumbling clumsily in his waistcoat pocket, he produced a tiny packet.

"No," I said, yawning, and watched him idly.

"Ah, you are fortunate. This little powder is a great benefactor to me. We are close to Vitznau. Thru the trees there you can get a glimpse of the hotel we are to stop at."

He pointed at a building a quarter of a mile distant from the landing stage we were fast approaching, holding in mid-air the packet of powder preparatory to placing it on his tongue.

I looked where he pointed; there was not much to see; the mist enveloped everything. The boy approached with the cognac.

My elbows on the table, I fingered carelessly the little glass placed in front of me, while that of Dr. Starva was being filled. As I tipped it toward me I caught a glimpse of a white powder in the bottom of my glass.

Dr. Starva's headache powder!

Here was treachery indeed! But I did not move a muscle. I lifted my eyes slowly. Dr. Starva's great head was tipped back. The packet, empty of its powder, of course, was placed at his lips. But his ratlike eyes were watching me narrowly.

I had need to think and act quickly. The powder was a narcotic to deaden my senses. That must be prevented at any cost; and yet he must think that I had taken the drug.

He had called my attention to the hotel while he cleverly slipped the powder into the glass. I ought not to be less adroit.

As the waiter passed around the table, his decanter in hand, I thrust out my leg and tripped him up neatly. He fell against Dr. Starva, the decanter still held carefully aloft.

In that moment of confusion I emptied the contents of my glass into my handkerchief. When Starva, furious and perhaps suspicious, pushed the man fiercely from him and looked at me, I was laughing heartily at his mishap, the handkerchief in one hand, the other holding out the glass for the brandy, the fingers closing over it to hide it from his view.

"Sante!" he cried boisterously, and drained the contents of his glass at a gulp. I followed his example, and in spite of the powerful liquor, I tasted (or fancied I tasted) the dregs of the bitter drug.

"Pah!" I cried in disgust; and was careful to hand the glass to the waiter instead of placing it on the table. "I have tasted better brandy than that in my life."

The expression of disgust promptly assured him that I had really drunk the potion given me. But now that I was supposed to have taken it, I wondered precisely what effect it should have on me, and how soon that effect should be felt.

Fortunately, he concerned himself with our luggage, for the boat was almost at the dock. When he returned to my side I greeted him in sleepy indifference. He looked at me keenly. I was not blind to his satisfaction. He shook my shoulder.

"What is it? Are we arrived?" I rose to my feet unsteadily.

"Yes, and it is necessary to hurry."

The handful of passengers had already left the boat. We descended the gangway slowly, Dr. Starva's arm grasping mine.

We entered the closed carriage that awaited us. I lurched clumsily into the vehicle, and sat crouched up in the corner, my head sunk on my breast. I assumed it safe and fitting that I should appear passably indifferent as to what passed now. Certainly by this time the drug would have taken some effect had I swallowed it. But I need not say that I had my wits with me.

My companion unfastened a valise he had brought into the carriage with him. I confess I watched him out of the corner of my eye in some trepidation.

I was thankful when he produced nothing more formidable than a military cloak and a felt hat. To my astonishment he deftly slipped from my shoulders the light covert coat I wore; and took my hat from my head, substituting the garments he had taken from his bag.

I could have laughed aloud, his confidence in my condition was so absolute, and his antics so extraordinary. When I left the carriage presently, surely the driver must see the change in my attire, and have his suspicions—unless he were in Dr. Starva's confidence!

And this fact did not escape me:

The hat did not ingulf me, as it must have done had it been Dr. Starva's.

Then if it were not his own——

In an instant I had guessed something of his game.

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* * *

Sudden Changes.

Two commercial travelers, one from London and one from New York, were discussing the weather in their respective countries.

The Englishman said that English weather had one great fault—its sudden changes.

"A person may take a walk one day," he said, "attired in a light summer suit, and still feel quite warm. Next day he needs an overcoat."

"That's nothing," said the American. "My two friends, Johnson and Jones, were once having an argument. There were eight or nine inches of snow on the ground. The argument got heated and Johnson picked up a snowball and threw it at Jones from a distance of not more than five yards. During the transit of that snowball, believe me or not, as you like, the weather changed and became hot and summerlike, and Jones, instead of being hit with a snowball, was—er—scalded with hot water?"

* * *

Ingratitude.

An old Scotswoman, who at considerable personal inconvenience had gone a good way to visit a friend who was ill, learned on her arrival that the alarming symptoms had subsided.

"An' hoo are ye the day, Mrs. Crawford?" she inquired, in breathless anxiety.

"Oh, I'm nearly well, noo, thank ye, Mrs. Graham."

"Nearly well," exclaimed the breathless visitor. "After me comin' sae far to see ye, too!"

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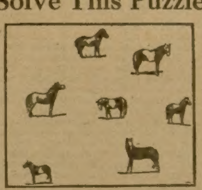

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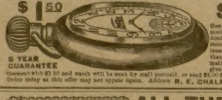

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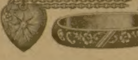

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My Friend Alton

Or,

The Adventure at Wells Canyon

By Frederic Knowles

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CHAPTER VI.

FROM Benny's tone I half suspected the sheriff's argument had been more leaden than otherwise, and indeed, so it proved.

"He is safe for the moment," continued Benny, "but you can't say for how long. Tonight the nesters will rush the jail and string him up. The sheriff winged one this morning, and they lay that against Alton, too. There will be a mob, I tell you. Outside of Whistler, the barkeeper, we two, and the sheriff, there is nobody to fight them."

"But the jail——" I began.

"Paper jail," snorted Benny. "We wouldn't have a show against fifty nesters. There is only one way out for us."

"What?"

"Get to George Whitman in time, and have him come and talk the nesters out of the notion. He can do it if he will. Otherwise——" Benny paused with an eloquent gesture.

"Where does he live?" I demanded.

"Who? Whitman?"

"Of course."

"You can't go. I'm the one for that."

"No, show me the road and I am all right. You stay here and try to scrape up another man or two in case I don't make connections. I'd be helpless at that job, but I can make a try for Whitman."

"You think you could make him come?"

"I can try. You couldn't get me a pistol, could you, Benny? This derringer is all right in a way, but not for this trip. And a horse; I'll see the livery barn about a horse."

"Here's the gun," said Benny, and he gave me his.

"You might need it," I said, refusing.

"I'll get another. Now, listen," and he gave me a few simple directions that would enable me to find Whitman's place.

We went downstairs. On the porch Benny held out his hand.

"Remember," he said simply, "you are obliged to make good. We are depending on you for Whitman. He is a scoundrel, with a heart of stone, but you have to find some way to make him come. Even offer him money if everything else fails. So long."

Benny went down the street. I put the weapon he had given me under the waistband of my trousers, and turned toward the stable.

The pony the stable hand led out for me appeared gentle enough for even such an embryo rider as I, and I mounted and rode away along the white road winding thru the cottonwoods above the creek. Benny had told me the trip would require three hours of moderate riding, and so I kept my mount at a good pace that put the miles behind rapidly. It was twenty minutes past eleven when I left the town, and by ten minutes to one I figured I ought to be halfway. But as yet the road followed the trend of the valley, and, never leaving the course of the creek for more than a few hundred yards, climbed bravely on.

As yet I had passed no houses save one, a little cabin perhaps a mile outside the town and set back in a rather heavy growth of trees. Of this place you shall hear again. But to return to my story.

At length the valley road turned off at right angles to the creek, which by this time was hardly a rivulet, and climbed the face of the hills and thru a gap. Here a vast expanse of level land lay before me, with distant clumps of trees marking the ravines. Undoubtedly this was the basin, and somewhere in it lay the Circle C. Before long I passed a cabin standing a little distance from the road, and this, I decided, must be the habitation of one of the nesters, or small landowners.

The sight of this brought back to me the seriousness of my mission. And I must not fail, for Alton's fate depended on me. To turn Whitman for us was my mission, and I must not fail. Benny had warned me that he was a villain, and my task would not be an easy one. If the worst came to the worst I was determined to use force if force seemed practical. And if everything else failed I was determined to return and help defend the jail and its prisoner. The power of angry men seemed very, very real to me that afternoon, as I galloped along the road and presently came to the forks. Here I turned to the right, according to directions, and followed the rutted track that wound along the base of the hills, with the great basin to my left. Really I was approaching the enemy's country for in a little gulch that issued from the pines above me I saw a plastered cabin standing in a grove of quaking aspens. Beyond it was a second, and above it still another.

After that the road wound thru a group of mighty granite projections issuing from the soil like sprouts of some gigantic plant. Then it climbed a long grade only to rest a moment before climbing another. And so I arrived at my destination.

It was a long rambling house of logs on the crest of a little knoll, the bottom of which was surrounded by a fence, and whose slopes were marked here and there with flowers. Whitman, I decided, must not be so terrible a person after all; as far as appearances went it might have been the home of any respectable Eastern farmer. Behind the knoll lay a straggling line of stables and outbuildings and haystacks, with the white-poled corrals beyond.

A wagon road led up to the knoll and past the house. I dismounted and opened the creaking gate. After mounting again I swept the slope for sight of some one, and was rewarded by seeing a girlish figure among the flowerbeds below the house. I considered a moment, and decided by riding toward her. It would not do to approach this household like a conqueror; if I would gain my end I must be meek.

My pony's hoofs made no sound on the short grass, and it was only the protesting creak of my saddle that betrayed my coming. The girl glanced up while I was still ten yards from her.

"How do you do?" she said, walking toward me down the row of flowers.

I touched my hat.

"I wish to find Mr. Whitman—your father, I presume."

"My stepfather," she corrected briefly.

"Could I see him?"

"Perhaps."

"It is extremely important, miss."

"He doesn't allow every one," said the girl. "However, if you like, I shall ask him to let you come in."

"If you would," I returned.

Indeed, it seemed as tho this man deserved his title of king among the nesters, in this indifference to others.

"Very well," said the girl. "If you will come with me——"

I dismounted and walked up the hill beside her, leading my pony across the short grass.

"I ought to have something more definite to tell him," the girl suggested, as we approached the house. "An inkling of your business——"

She paused and glanced at me curiously, no doubt wondering what brought me out of my natural element, so to speak, for my city clothes certainly were out of place there. Among the male population, that is; as for the girl she seemed different somehow. Strangely unlike her surroundings. I would have been willing to stake all I owned that she had not spent her entire life in the place; that she would have been more at home on an avenue.

"That is but fair," I agreed. "Tell him——" I paused to choose my words carefully. "Tell him," I repeated, "that it is of the utmost importance that I see him; that it is a matter of life and death, and that I shall not take no for an answer. I must see him."

"Rather strongly put," said the girl.

"Is it sufficient?" I asked.

"It will make him angry. I would not be so violent, Mr.——" she hesitated, and I flushed.

"How stupid of me," I said. "My name is Bennant, Frank Bennant."

"Bennant?" she hesitated, and flushed in turn. "The name sounded familiar," she explained after a moment. "I have heard Mr.—some one must have mentioned you in my hearing. You have been here long?"

"Only since last evening," I told her.

"Yes?" she said slowly. I knew that

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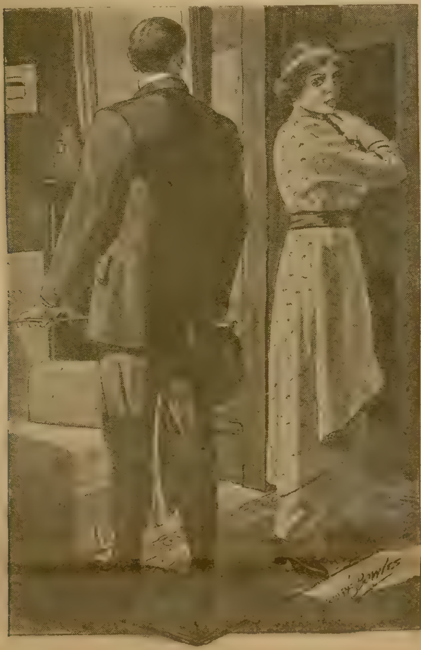

"You were never in greater peril."

she had been on the point of asking me a question and had suddenly changed her mind. She did not speak again until we had climbed the steps and were in a large, pleasantly furnished living-room and library combined, whose windows looked out over the road by which I had come.

"You will wait here, Mr. Bennant, until I see Mr. Whitman. I shall try to return as quickly as possible. You wouldn't like to change your statement to him? Something more er -diplomatic, we shall say?"

She smiled. It was as tho she had momentarily lifted a mask, and then replaced it. Somehow I gained the impression this mask had been caused by terror. The statement sounds absurd. Afterward, I knew I had been right. As she waited for my answer I knew she was desperately unhappy. Her sad eyes gave the lie to the smile.

"No," I said, "I would rather you didn't change it. But you may add something."

"Worse and worse." She was almost gay.

"I must be in Wells Canyon by sundown. I desire your stepfather to come with me. Will you please tell him that, also."

"Just as you say, Mr. Bennant, but I can't promise that he shall agree with your wishes," and she turned to the door, and then, to my surprise, as quickly came back to me.

"Mr. Bennant," she said in a low tense voice, "if any one should come into this room while I am gone, pay no attention to him, but while apparently noticing nothing, notice everything! You are armed; if forced, do not hesitate a moment. You were never in greater peril than you are at this instant. If I were you, I should not sit with my back to the window."

Seeing my surprise at her words, she hesitated a moment.

"Oh," she said slowly, "you are not one of them? But, remember, that fact does not make your peril any the less; they do not know."

When she had gone, I dropped into a chair, dazed. And then, noticing I had disobeyed her order concerning the window, I got to my feet and sought another seat in the corner. Her words had been to me like a thunderbolt from a clear sky. Benny had warned me that Whitman was a villain, but he had not spoken of the place as a lion's den. The girl's truthfulness I had never for a moment questioned. Her tone had been too tense, too surely the voice of her thoughts, for me to question. And so, without the slightest hesitation I took every precaution she had suggested. And against what? It is the unknown that most terrifies. Creatures of the dark are the horrors of our childhood, because we never see them. Something of this clings thru life. We think we have thrown off such things because we are too busy to remember. And then, all at once, caught unprepared for it, a word caused by intense fear springs the locks we had thought secure, and we are overcome by terror. I glanced thru the window.

Outside, the world basked in intense sunshine. Everything seemed at peace; birds chirped, a little dog lay in the shade and dozed; it was a glorious day. Somewhere, there in the sunniest spot, perhaps, death lurked. The girl's voice had spoken certainty, even if I had not heard her words. She had warned me to be careful of windows. For the twentieth time I felt the rims of the cartridges in my loaded revolver. And then an idea came to me; were the cartridges unfired? It sound foolish as I write. With my poor resources I cannot hope to make you see my fear. You smile when I say I ejected the bullets and examined each carefully, never removing more than half of them at a time.

Ten minutes went by. A breeze had sprung up, and at each creak of the old house I started. Half an hour passed, and still the girl did not return. I waited impatiently; the thirty minutes had become an hour. Scarcely noticing what I did, I picked a book from the stand beside me. Opening it mechanically a verse caught my eye; a verse of four lines:

"Deep in the night hides terror,
And the day's light shows error.
But that which is last shall reveal the first
And the net be cast o'er the head accursed."

Something peculiar about them caused me to glance again. The lines had been underscored with a pen! With a pen held in a trembling hand! I followed the undulations in the line of ink. Somehow they fascinated me as I studied them. The sound of an opening door brought me to my feet. There was a little cry, and I saw I was covering the girl with the cocked revolver.

"I understand," she said evenly. "Some day I shall go insane."

"Leave," I suggested. "You can?"

"No. I promised my mother I would take care of—of Mr. Whitman. I said I would do the best I could."

"He isn't kind," I said. "You should go away."

"I promised." Her words contained that note which defies contradiction or argument. It was the essence of finality itself.

"And what does he say about my seeing him?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"You are to go away."

"Then he won't see me under any consideration?"

"Under any consideration."

"But I must. Will you kindly show me to his room?"

"He is not to be molested."

"I am sorry." I moved toward the door.

"He is in a fearful rage," she cried.

"Nevertheless I must see him."

"You are to leave the house, fellow."

I whirled to confront this new speaker. He was a short man of about 40 or thereabouts, but possessing that build which denotes immense strength. His attitude as he eyed me was most assuredly not one to encourage disobedience.

"Who gave you your orders?" I demanded.

"None of your business," he snapped.

"Go away, Larry," broke in the girl. "I promise he will leave."

"Sorry, Miss Claire, but orders is orders."

I glanced at the girl.

"Please obey," she said slowly.

"You wish it?" I asked.

"Yes, if you wish to avoid trouble——"

One glance and I was satisfied. Her voice in saying, "If you wish to avoid trouble," had cried, "Coward!"

"Miss Claire," I said, "would you show me Mr. Whitman's room? I have delayed long enough. Time is growing precious."

"None uh that," snapped the fellow called Larry, as he stepped between the girl and me. "You get out or I'll help you along." He moved toward me.

There are [illegible] all regard for the Afterward, of an act. As I thought of Benny's white face and words of parting, a sense of rage came over me. My fear of a few moments before was forgotten. The revolver was still in my hand, which in turn was concealed by the flap of my coat. With all the force I could summon, I struck him across the head with the heavy barrel. Glancing blow as it was, it dropped [illegible]

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without groan. I stepped over him and opened the door.

The girl walked ahead of me without speaking, along a narrow hall, past several doors, and up a stairway at the end. At the top she paused.

"The door is locked," she said

"Whitman won't open?"

"No."

"But you——" I began.

"He came outside to talk to me."

"He talked to you for an hour?"

"No, merely for a few minutes. I was listening."

"Yes?" I said

"I know why you came, Mr. Bennant. But it is no use."

"Will Whitman listen to me?"

"You can try."

"Mr. Whitman," I called thru the panels. "Mr. Whitman!" There was no answer. After a short wait I called again. No answer.

"He won't listen," said the girl

"Is he alone?" I asked.

"One other man is there with him"

"Is the door fastened?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Bars, and a lock."

"The bars are wood?"

"Yes."

Behind the panels I heard some one stir. Some one was listening.

I glanced about. A chair stood behind me, but its light construction would splinter to fragments and accomplish nothing. And then I caught sight of the stair-rail. The spindles supporting it were fragile; the banister itself was hardwood three inches square. Where the stairs turned a newel-post stood. From there to the top was a distance of about six feet. In three minutes I had the section of oak in my hands.

All this time there had been no protest from the room. Nor, indeed, was there when I swung my improvised battering-ram against the panels of the door. In a moment the framework was splintered. Another blow and the whole thing tottered inward. Pistol in hand, I sprang into the room.

I had time to notice little save that it was rather large, about thirty feet square, with the ceiling following the slope of the roof. There was little furniture. Several chairs; a long table, a great many boxes, a cupboard filled with bottles and glass jars, and a heavy wooden bed. On the bed lay a lax figure, face downward.

I noticed that, and then behind me the girl screamed suddenly, a quick warning, but before I could turn there was a terrific blow from behind and everything was blotted out.

CHAPTER VII.

THE first sensation I remember upon returning to consciousness was that of being cold. Life is a succession of surprises; as I lay there on the floor I was astonished to find that I was freezing. For a few moments I lay there inert, trying to account for the sensation. I never have to this day. Gradually I became rational, and I attempted to force an account of the attack upon me from my disordered brain. After a time my memory became clearer. I remembered the girl's cry of warning, and the blow.

With an effort, I regained my feet. The room was absolutely empty. For a moment I thought of investigating it, and then, suddenly, I remembered my errand. The sight of the gray twilight coming faintly thru the windows cleared my mind. I glanced at my watch. It was still running and showed half-past six. With a groan I turned toward the door. Alton was lost.

I reproached myself as I weakly descended the stairs. If I had let Benny come in my place he might have succeeded where I failed. Suddenly I remembered my revolver. Slowly I reascended into the room. There it lay on the floor, apparently uninjured. With the recovered weapon in my coat, I turned away. The broken banister lay where I had dropped it. The splinters from the door had not been removed. Below, the hall was deserted. In the living-room the fellow, Larry, had been removed. I wondered if I had killed him.

Outside, my pony still stood with dragging reins, and I mounted and rode down the hill without seeing a living thing. Once thru the gate I paused and looked back. Beyond the house the sunset flamed down against the hills; save for myself, the landscape seemed deserted. What had become of the girl, Claire? For a moment I thought of returning, and then decided against such an act. Perhaps I would still be in time to help defend the jail against the attack Benny said would come. I put my pony into a gallop

It had required three hours for me to make the outward trip. Even supposing that I returned in two hours I could not be at the jail until after nine o'clock. But then the attack might be delayed. Slightly heartened by the idea, I urged my mount thru the growing dusk.

But as I rode, my fears returned. The houses I passed seemed deserted. No lights showed. Nor did I meet any one on the road. I thought of Benny, the old barkeeper and the sheriff, outnumbered, trying to pacify the mob. Would Whitman be there, I wondered.

After descending from the basin and turning into the valley road, I figured I was half-way. So far the trip had required but a few minutes over an hour. Perhaps I would yet be in time. My mount, altho lathered, was still going strongly, and I felt he would stand the pace. It was growing dark among the trees, and whenever I passed thru a grove the road became indistinct. Every time the pony stumbled my heart went into my throat for fear he would come up lame. But in this case luck seemed with me. After a time I issued out into a little plateau where I could see the lights of Wells Canyon. Apparently all was quiet there, altho of course it was too far away as yet for me to distinguish anything even had it been day.

As I clattered down the slope it suddenly occurred to me that perhaps Benny had been over-zealous in his statements of what the nesters would do. Fear of the sheriff, even if they did contemplate an attack, might hold them back, at least for a time, and the spirit of the mob is so much a matter of the moment. Frustrated, they might melt away. Even the sight of a few determined to resist might save my friend. And in this manner I argued myself somewhat out of my fears as I galloped along the last few miles. And then, like a blow in the face, I heard a sudden fusillade of shots ahead. The attack had begun.

The livery barn seemed deserted as I flashed past it, nor did any one appear as I clattered over the bridge and past the saloon. Ahead, the shooting stopped as if by magic. For a few moments my straining ears detected no sound, and then a crowd began shouting. What could it mean? Had the defense been overcome so easily? With a fast-beating heart I rode on.

Before me was the jail. Among the trees before it and on the walks surrounding it, a crowd surged and talked excitedly. As I came nearer two horsemen passed me, and for a moment I could hear their conversation.

"There's something crooked about this," observed one.

"I don't believe the sheriff would lie," returned the other.

"You can't tell," said the first speaker. "He favors the cattlemen."

"I figure he will give every one a fair show," cried the other.

"Mebbe."

"Oh, well, it can't be helped," and as he spoke the fellow glanced at me. "Anyway, I got my opinion," he went on. "How about you, pardner?" This query was directed at me.

I pulled up my horse.

"What's that?" I demanded.

"Is the sheriff on the square?"

I began to think he was making fun at my expense.

"How should I know?" I demanded irritably.

"I'm sure I couldn't say," he retorted, and turned to ride on.

"Wait a minute," I cried after him.

"Well?" He turned toward me, and as he did so I recognized with a start of surprise the man called Jake who had advised me the night before to use a rock to waken the boy at the livery barn.

"Why don't those fellows go in and get the prisoner?" I waved my hand toward the men beneath the trees.

"Because there ain't any prisoner to get."

"What? Has he escaped?"

"I reckon."

"No clew as to where he went?"

"Not the slightest."

"Who was doing the shooting?"

"The crowd. That was before they found out about Rodgers being gone."

And as he finished speaking, the fellow drew out a small metal box from his pocket and calmly inserted a pinch of snuff behind his lip, and then rode on.

My first impulse was to ride after him, altho, goodness knows what I expected to gain by doing so. It would hardly do to ride up behind him and suddenly accuse him of opening Alton's letter because I had seen him take snuff. What I would have done, I can hardly say, had I not felt a sudden hand on my bridle. Looking down I saw Benny's white face peering up at me.

"You!" he cried. "Why——"

"Say it," I encouraged. "You look as tho you had seen a ghost."

"For an instant I thought I was looking at one, sure enough," he said.

"Why?"

"Miss Winton said you were dead."

"Miss Winton; pray who is Miss Winton?"

"Whitman's stepdaughter."

"Is she here?"

"Until a few minutes ago."

"How——" I began, but Benny cut me short.

"Come over to the saloon," he said briefly. "I got some business with you in private. Go right in and tell Whistler to show you the way up."

Before I could question the young fellow further, he was gone. For a moment I saw him moving swiftly along the walk, and then he disappeared among the trees. Turning my mount I rode back down the street. At the "hitchin' post" before the saloon I tied my pony and walked thru the swinging doors. Whistler, busy at some occupation behind the bar, glanced up.

"Hello, Mr. Bennant," he said cordially. "I thought the girl was mistaken. Fellows like you don't die so easily as that."

"Benny told me to come over," I explained. "He said for you to show me the way up. Those are his words."

"I suppose you understood him?"

"Well, no, but I hoped you would."

"And I do; right this way."

The barkeeper walked to a small door at the back end of the bar, and opened it. He pointed into the darkness.

"First door to the right," he said. "I'd

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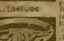

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go with you, but I can't leave the place. Want a light?"

I said no. The moment I had passed thru the doorway my foot encountered the bottom of some stairs. With my hand on the wall and with careful steps I mounted into the darkness. Behind me I heard the door close, and at the same instant I found myself in a narrow hall with the knob of a door showing dimly before me.

It turned easily, and I entered a fairly large room, evidently at the front of the saloon, for thru the cracked window shade, pulled low, the yellow porch light came faintly.

The place was very dark. A search of my pockets failed to produce a match, and so, thinking to help matters somewhat, I threw up the shade. And by this very trivial action I wrecked some rather cunningly laid plans and very nearly precipitated a disaster.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE light from the porch lamp outside the window now streamed faintly into the room, and I was able to locate a chair without the danger of battered shins. Sinking into it, I glanced about. The place was about fifteen feet square. Against one wall stood a bed, and beyond the door was a heavy square table littered with books and magazines. Several chairs and a couch completed the furniture. A curtained-off corner at the foot of the bed formed the wardrobe, as the sight of several garments behind the partly drawn curtains testified. A rifle in a scabbard hung over the table, and the antlers which supported it also held an empty pistol holster and belt. Several framed pictures stood out dark from the faded paper. The floor was bare.

I had scarcely completed these observations when the stairs creaked and some one came down the hall.

"Here is Benny," I thought as the steps came up to the door.

But it wasn't Benny. The newcomer paused in the doorway, and then stepped out into the portion of the room which was lit up somewhat by the light outside. The man was Alton. Recognizing him, I uttered an involuntary exclamation. He whirled.

"You, Frank!" he said.

"Yes, Al."

"You are not hurt?"

"Who said I was hurt?" I demanded.

"Claire—Miss Winton."

"You have seen her?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At the jail." Alton turned [illegible] his hands nervously.

"I did my best," I said slowly. "I suppose she told you."

He nodded and said yes.

"What made you so mad as to come here, Al?" I cried. "The mob will learn you are here and come for you."

"How?"

"Some one will say that you——"

"No one saw me come, Frank. The people here won't say anything. They are my friends."

"But the sheriff," I protested. "He might come."

"The sheriff is gone," said Alton, calmly.

"How do you know?"

He motioned toward the window. For an instant I did not comprehend, and then I remembered Benny's words: "He asked me to keep the blind down in my room over the saloon every time the sheriff is in town." I jumped to my feet in dismay.

"Al," I cried, "that wasn't meant to be a signal! I put that shade up. You see there wasn't any light in here, and I didn't have a match, and so I put it up ——" I paused and hesitated miserably.

Alton took a step toward me. One glance at his haggard face and I clutched his arm.

"Al," I said, "there is time yet to get away. Go at once, perhaps——"

"No, Frank," he returned. "I won't go. And so you are a traitor, too."

"A traitor?"

"Out with it, Frank. I won't lift my hand against you."

"But, Al, explain yourself. What do you mean? How am I a traitor?"

He glanced at me for an instant.

"Perhaps it is just as well, Frank. Things are all wrong, anyway. You know I wish those nesters had taken me tonight? Benny meant all right, but I wish he hadn't done as he did. And as for Claire—Frank, she got me away this evening. You knew that?"

My expression of astonishment must have convinced him.

"Well, she did. If her stepfather knew——" Alton shuddered. "You won't tell him, Frank?" His tone was piteous.

"You fool!" I said. "What has got into you, Al? You seem to think that I know all about this; I know absolutely nothing. You call me a traitor. Explain your grounds."

"Then you didn't take up Whitman's offer?" he questioned.

"Whitman's offer?" I snapped. "He made me no offer. And that isn't half of it; he would never get a chance to make one. For as sure as I am here if he ever crosses my trail, I will come to book with him for what he has done. He or his men tried to kill me today. [illegible] this he has caused Miss Winton unhappiness. Offer indeed!" And I snorted.

"Then," said Alton, "the sheriff lied. Remember that, Frank."

"Why should I?"

"Tell Benny that, will you? He ought to know."

"Benny will be here in a few minutes," I said. "You tell him."

"The sheriff will be with him," said Alton, slowly.

"Then you must leave."

"There isn't time."

"How do you know he is coming?"

"He was to be here this evening; Benny told me. When I saw the blind up, I decided that he must have changed his mind. Understand?"

"Forgive me, Alton," I said. "I should have remembered. It is all my fault. Can we do nothing? If he comes we shall overpower him."

"He will be watching."

"We shall get the drop on him," I said, patting my pocket where the revolver was. "There is a rifle on the wall for you."

"That would do no good unless we kill him. If we merely tie him up he will be missed soon. They will find him here, and then I am gone."

"Explain yourself."

"The nesters think I have left the country. If the sheriff comes and learns that I have not, he will tell them."

"I thought the sheriff was friendly to you," I protested.

"Until this evening he was; now he would kill me if he could."

"Al," I cried, "won't you enlighten me on this thing? Today Benny played with me when I questioned him. What is the meaning of this mystery? Surely I can help some, at least."

"It is not my secret," replied Alton, moodily. "I can't tell you."

"Do you still suspect me of being a traitor, Alton?"

"No, Frank."

The question on my lips remained unspoken. Below I heard footsteps on the stairs.

This strange story leads to very extraordinary situations and dramatic episodes. The reader will find it eminently worth reading to the end. Next week's Ledger will contain further chapters of it. The surest way to get the Ledger is to subscribe for it and have it come to your home regularly. Today is a good time to attend to this.

* * *

The Modern Test.

You aspire to become our professor of modern languages?" asked the president of the board of trustees of the Milledgeville College.

"Yes, sir," was the respectful answer of the applicant.

"Koennen Sie Deutsch sprechen?" asked the trustee sharply.

"Jawohl!" came the answer of the applicant, not to be taken off his guard thus easily.

"Parlez-vous francais?' demanded the interrogator, giving the applicant no time for recovery.

"Oui," said the applicant. The president beamed with pleasure upon his fellow members of the board.

"It seems," he said addressing no one in particular, "that the gentleman is eminently qualified for the post. But," turning again to the applicant, "there is one more question that I must ask you. What is the simian equivalent of fear as expressed in the monkey language as transcribed by Professor Garner?"

Realizing that he had failed in the supreme test, the applicant turned sadly away.

* * *

Beginning Early.

Jack disliked being kissed, and, being a handsome little chap, sometimes had a good deal to put up with. One day he had been kissed a lot. Then, to make matters worse, on going to the picture palace in the evening, instead of his favorite cowboy and Indian pictures, there was nothing but a lot more hugging and kissing.

He returned home completely out of patience with the whole tribe of women.

After he had been tucked into bed mother came in to kiss him good night.

He refused to be kissed.

Mother begged and begged, till in disgust he turned to his father, who was standing at the doorway looking on, and said:

"Daddy, for the love of Heaven, give this woman a kiss!"

* * *

Could Guess.

A witness, a jolly, plump old lady, on trial in the Supreme Court at Worcester, was asked at what time a certain train of cars passed her house. She replied that she began knitting at three o'clock and had knit twice around the leg of a stocking before they came along. The next question, of course, was how long it would take her to knit twice around. The judge here, in his usual quiet humor, suggested that that would depend upon the size of the stocking. To this the witness remarked that the stocking was for herself and they could exercise their own judgment as to the size and guess how long it would take.

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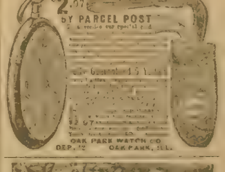

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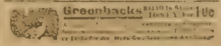

THE SAME KIDNEY REMEDY CURES MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

Obtains Permanent Relief

I was afflicted about five years with kidney and bladder trouble; there was one year during this five years that I was not able to do anything; in fact, I was helpless. I tried several doctors and several remedies, and my family doctor advised me that I would have to be operated on. I was then advised by a lady friend to try Swamp-Root, after using seven bottles of Dr. Kilmer's Swamp-Root I was restored to good health and have not been bothered with kidney or bladder trouble for the last ten years. I cheerfully recommend Swamp-Root to others for kidney or bladder trouble.

Yours truly,
MRS. J. R. TURNER,
212 West Dalton St., Hugo, Okla.

Personally appeared before me this 27th day of February, 1915, Mrs. J. R. Turner, who subscribed the above statement and made oath that the same is true in substance and fact.

J. H. FINCHER,
Notary Public.

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I wish to advise that I have been bothered with kidney and bladder trouble since childhood, and after my mother, Mrs. J. R. Turner, trying Dr. Kilmer's Swamp-Root and being cured, I tried the same and recommend that it is the best that I have ever tried; in fact, I was helpless when I began taking it and am now in good health. I cheerfully recommend Swamp-Root to others.

Yours truly,
MISS NELLIE TURNER,
212 West Dalton St., Hugo, Okla.

Personally appeared before me this [illegible]th day of February, 1915, Miss Nellie Turner, who subscribed the above statement and made oath that the same is true in substance and in fact.

J. H. FINCHER,
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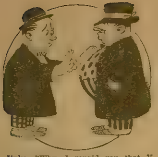
Prove What Swamp-Root Will Do For You

Send ten cents to Dr. Kilmer & Co., Binghamton, N. Y., for a sample size bottle. It will convince anyone. You will also receive a booklet of valuable information, telling about the kidneys and bladder. When writing, be sure and mention the Chicago Ledger. Regular fifty-cent and one-dollar size bottles for sale at all drug stores.



Jinks—"Why, I repaid you that V, old chap, but you were intoxicated at the time and don't remember it."

Binks—"Huh! If I'd been intoxicated you'd have borrowed more."

AND SHE DID.

She said "I will." With downcast eyes
And maiden blush, the season's prize
Whispered the word that made them one
And joy ran riot 'neath the sun
While Wisdom smiled—well, Wisdom-wise.

Thereafter to his great surprise
Her pledge she kept, despite his sighs;
Tho he forbade things to be done
She said—"I will!"

A Way Out of It.

One of the wealthy members of a fashionable church in Boston approached her pastor with the complaint that she was greatly disturbed by one of her neighbors.

"It's positively unbearable," said she. "That man in the pew in front of us destroys all my devotional and pious feelings when he attempts to sing. Couldn't you ask him to change his pew?"

The good pastor was sorely perplexed After a few moments' reflection he said

"Well, I naturally would feel a little delicacy on that score, more especially as I would have to give a reason. But I will tell you what I might do." Here the pastor's face became illuminated with a happy thought. "I might ask him to join the choir."

Permission Given.

Among the Presidents about whom many stories were told was Grover Cleveland One which he enjoyed very much himself was that one time when he was out hunting he was overtaken by darkness, and coming to a fisherman's hut knocked at the door. The family had retired, but after repeated knockings a man put his head out of a window and asked.

"Who's there?"

"I am Grover Cleveland."

"Well, what do you want?"

"I want to stay here all night

"All right, stay there."

PREPAREDNESS.

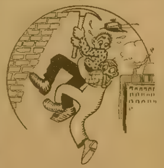
When Noah planned his dreadnought ark
His neighbors loudly scoffed;
They said he was an easy mark
And had bats in his loft.
But when the floods began to rise
And storms began to rage,
They praised his "splendid enterprise"
And berths sought to engage.

However, all the space was let
To bug and beast and bird,
And folks in Missus Noah's set—
'Twas pos'tively absurd!
But Noah'd made a little list
As he'd a right to do,
And not a single pacifist
Appeared in his Who's Zoo!

Seemed So.

"I see that the average man consumes one ton of solid and liquid nourishment in a year," said the boarder with the red necktie.

"Well," replied the woman who kept the house. "I'm quite sure my men boarders are away above the average"



Man Above—"Hey, leggo, or I'll smash yuh one with me pick!"

The Poor Cat.

I.

Steve was making his usual Wednesday night call.

"I seen Floss last night, Mame," he said. "Her dress was all lined with fur at the neck It's the style, you know. Maybe she didn't look swell, Mame."

And he stroked the Gallagher cat, which was between them on the sofa purring "Bedelia"

II

Steve was making his usual Sunday night call.

"Why, Mame," he cried, "ye got fur on yer dress, ain't ye, just like I said I liked it? Mame, ye looks swell."

III

"Say, Mame," said Steve along about the time to go home, "where's the cat? I ain't seen her all evening."

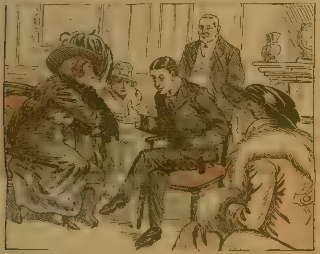
Mame spoke for first time during the story.

"She's gone, she said, simply

The Duties.

"What are the duties of the office to which you aspire?"

"What should I know about them? I expect to be the head of the office; not one of the clerks"



Inquisitive Lady—"And what do you do with the submarines when you catch them?"

Naval Officer—"Depends on their size. We always throw back the little ones

Explosions.

Flatbush—"I see by the paper that a telephone which is claimed to be explosion proof has been invented."

Bensonhurst—"Why, I never heard of an explosion in a telephone."

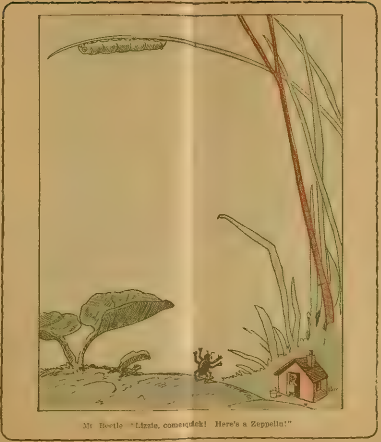
"You didn't? Say, every time my wife telephones me there's an explosion'

A Promoter.

John—"I'm going to have a swell feed in the room tonight."

George—"I'll be there."

John—"All right. Lend me a quarter to buy some crackers; you get some milk and cheese, and we'll have a rarebit"



Mr Beetle 'Lizzie, come quick! Here's a Zeppelin!"

He Was Sure of It.

A Barnegat schoolma'am had been telling her pupils something about George Washington, and finally she asked:

Can any one now tell me which Washington was—a great general or a great admiral?"

The small son of a fisherman raised his hand and she signaled him to speak.

"He was a great general," said the boy. "I seen a picture of him crossing the Delaware, and no great admiral would put out from shore standing up in a skiff."

Detachment.

"That woman with the faraway look in her eyes has played a church organ for twenty years and has never missed a service."

"Remarkable! How do you account for the faraway look in her eyes?"

"I guess that comes from habitually thinking of something else while the preacher is delivering his sermon."

The Way of a Man.

"That's the way with a man."

"What i[illegible]"

"He often said he [illegible] lay down [illegible] for me!"

"Well?"

"And now he grumbled when I ask him to lay down a carpet!"

Believes That.

"Do you believe everything you hear?"

"No, but when I come to a railroad crossing and hear a whistle I never doubt that a train is coming"

Owned the Place.

A Chicago man with business interests in Missouri tells of an incident at a railway junction therein. He was very hungry, with only two minutes before the departure of his train.

"Sandwich and coffee, quick!" he said to the counter man. "Haven't time for anything else."

"Easy, friend," said the other. "Take all the time you want. Cast your eye over this bill of fare and I'll telephone the superintendent to hold the train for a while."

"Hold the train while I eat?"

"Sure. This is a branch road and there's no other train comin' or goin' over it this mornin'. The superintendent will want you to have a good meal—he owns this lunchroom."

Mutual.

First Tommy—"Got toothache, 'ave yer? I'd 'ave the beggar out if it was mine"

Second Ditto—"So would I if it was yours."

A LEAP YEAR HINT.

She was an elderly maiden lady, ma'am,
Wealthy, withal, but a bit of a shrew;
Younger was he, but of character shady, ma'am.
Bold and good-looking, to give him his due.

His occupations, tho' many and various,
Contact with bear traps never had brought,
Till, in her flat on a mission burglarious,
He, stumbling into one, safely was caught!

Yelling with pain he awakened the spin-is-ter.
"Ha! I have caught one," she gloated, "at last!"
Ere morning the license they had, and the minister
Tied the hymeneal knot hard and fast!

"How did you know that Col. Gruff was from Alabama?"

"Because he has such a mobile face."

Not Gallantry.

Mr. Brown had just thrust his feet beneath his desk and comfortably settled himself for a long afternoon's work when the office door opened and a woman canvasser entered with a satchel slung from her shoulder.

"An agent!" groaned Mr. Brown, as she advanced to his side.

"Good afternoon, sir," said she politely. "Have you any objection to a lady blacking your shoes for you?"

Indeed I have!" responded Mr. Brown, emphatically.

"Oh, you mustn't mind a little thing like that," said she, reassuringly. "It's just a matter of business. I'm introducing a new kind of shoe polish and I can't sell any unless I demonstrate to you what it is, can I? So just put out your feet, and I'll black your shoes in a moment."

"I cannot permit it, madam," asseverated Mr. Brown. "On no account will I permit you to do such a thing."

"I know a great many gentlemen do object to letting a lady do such work and a great credit it is to their gallantry," said the lady sales agent

"Oh, I don't mind that," asserted Mr Brown, interrupting her.

"Why, what is your objection then?"

"Mine are tan shoes"

How He Used Ice.

English men-of-war have no ice making machines on board, as do our ships, and everybody knows how the English fail to understand us on the subject of the use of ice, especially in our drinks.

An English officer was aboard one of our ships of the Asiatic fleet and, on being served with an iced drink, commented on the delights of having cool water aboard. The American officer responded with an offer of a small cake of ice, which was sent the following morning. Meeting the Englishman ashore a week later, the American asked him if he had enjoyed the ice.

"Enjoy it, old top? Why, do you know, that was the first cold bawth I've had since I left England"

A Wise Citizen.

"Why did George Washington say he couldn't tell a lie?" asked Meandering Mike

"Because he was one of our wisest citizens," replied Plodding Pete. "He knowed perfeckly well dat when you're caught wid de goods, your only move is to make a play fur immunity."

Father and Uncle.

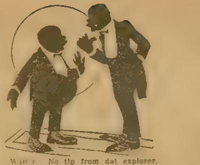
Sammy—"Who is the father of his country?"

Jimmie—"George Washington.

Sammy—"Correct. Who is his uncle?"

Jimmie—"Why, I don't know.'

Sammy—"Uncle Sam."



Waiter No tip from dat explorer, eh? He's most decidedly economical!

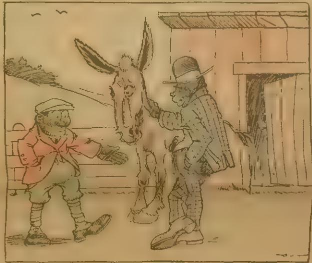
Brother Waiter—"He suttinly am! He's longer from tip to tip dan any crockerdile he evah shot!"

Too Late.

It was Washington's Birthday and the teacher had been telling of what a great and good man Washington was. She concluded by asking all the boys that would like to be a second George Washington to hold up their hands. Then all held up their hands but one

"Wouldn't you like to be a second George Washington, Tommy?" she asked

Too late now," said Tommy. "I have told too many lies."



Mose—"Dis am a pretty good mule fo' $5 He may live fo' years'"

Pete—"Yes! Dat am his one grave fault!"

Foolish Idea.

"I fear," remarked the zealous citizen to the party boss, "that you are not in politics for your health."

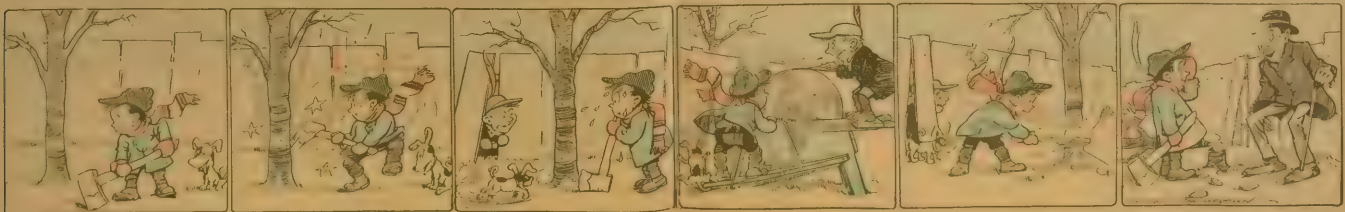
"Well, why should I be?" asked the boss, genially. "I've never been sick [illegible]

Two Views.

Bacon—"According to a Paris physician, premature baldness is due to some trouble with teeth."

Egbert "Think, perhaps, it's the other way round, because a man usually loses his hair before he does his teeth."

ON WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY



George Washington Jones—"Well, this is my day to get busy and do something like my namesake, and hack down a cherry tree or two!

"Gee-whiz! She don't hack down worth a cent! This will be an all day's job with this old, dull ax!"

Sammy Snicker—"Hey, Wash, when do ye expect to git that tree cut down with that blunt-edged old cleaver? Come on over here, I'll show ye!

"Now, kid, you keep the grindstone goin' an' I'll show ye how to put a reg'lar George Washington edge on this hacker."

Wash—"Say, there's sure some class to the way she cuts now' I'll soon put this old cherry tree on the bum!" (Whack' Biff' Bang')

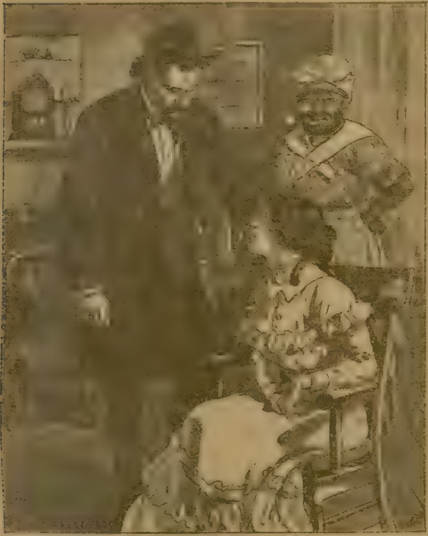
Father Jones—"What have you done, my son?"

Wash—"Father, I cannot tell a lie. I knew you were going to cut down this old tree, and I beat you to it. Lone Scouts must do one good act each day."

HOW ONE WOMAN LOVED

Or, The Hungerford Manor Tragedy

By Emma Howard Wight



"Where were you the morning that Hungerford was killed?"

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Begun in No. 6, February 5. Subscriptions can begin with that issue or back copies can be obtained from news stands, our agents, or by mail from office of publication.

CHAPTER VIII.

UPON leaving the overseer's house, Macquillan lingered about the quarters, talking with the negroes and, finally, drifting to old Elinore's cottage. He found the old darky alone.

"I want to have a talk with you, auntie, about your master," Macquillan told her.

"Take a seat, sir," invited Elinore. She looked at him a little curiously. "Is you one ob dem writer mens, sah?" she queried.

Macquillan nodded. He had his reasons for not wishing her to know his real business.

"Do you live by yourself, auntie?" he asked.

"No, sah, Lorine, she libs wid me."

"Oh, that's the pretty octoroon," remarked Macquillan, with seeming carelessness. "I thought she lived at the big house."

"No, de massa wanted Lorine up at de big house, but she war mortal ag'in' it. Jes' befo' he want 'way de massa come heah to de cabin and tell Lorine she gotter come up to de big house 'long he comes back. He gwine to make her housekeeper. And arter he gone, Lorine sade to me, 'I'd radder die.'"

"If she felt like that, I reckon she wasn't much cut up over the master's death?" suggested Macquillan.

"I ain't so sho' 'bout dat," declared Elinore. "Dat gal, Lorine, ain't been lak herse'f sence de massa war killed. De mo'nin' he war killed, she come in bery quiet-lak, her face chalk-white and her eyes a-starin'. 'What's de mattah wid you, gal?' I done ax her. 'De massa's layin' in de maple grove dade,' she sade, her voice all a-trimble. 'He's been shot.'"

"You say she came into the cabin?" questioned Macquillan. "Had she been away that morning?"

"Ya'as, she went 'way 'bout nine o'clock to gadder cowslips to make wine," explained Elinore. "Marse Mahshall allers got me to make him some cowslip wine ebery summer. He 'lowed nobody could make it like me. So Lorine, she went out dat mo'nin' to gadder cowslips, but she didn't bring none home."

There was a minute's silence. Macquillan beat a thoughtful tattoo on the wooden table by which he was sitting. It came back to him that when he examined the ground where the body of Marshall Hungerford had been found it was strewn with cowslips, and they were faded and dead.

"What time was it when Lorine returned and told you Mr. Hungerford was lying dead in the maple grove?" asked Macquillan.

"It war quartah to twelve by dat thar clock," replied Elinore, pointing to an old-fashioned clock on the wooden mantel over the fireplace.

Macquillan's sandy eyebrows lifted slightly. The lithe, graceful form of a girl darkened the doorway of the cabin.

"Heah am Lorine," said Elinore.

Macquillan arose, his pale eyes on the girl's face. His profession had made him proficient in reading human faces, and he saw at once that the girl was laboring under a severe mental strain. Slowly he moved nearer to her. Suddenly he stopped and spoke with startling abruptness.

"Where were you on the morning that Marshall Hungerford was killed?" he asked.

A gasping cry left the girl's lips, her eyes widened with a look like fear. Her lips parted dumbly.

"Were you in the maple grove?" added Macquillan.

Still she did not speak, she stared at him dumbly, shaking with fear. Old Elinore leaned forward in her chair, staring at Lorine.

"What's de mattah wid you, chile?" she exclaimed.

But Lorine did not appear to hear her. Her eyes, with the look of anguished fear in them, never left Macquillan's face. He laid his hand on her shoulder.

"You must come with me," he said. As he spoke, he turned back the lapel of his coat disclosing his badge. "I arrest you for the murder of your master, Marshall Hungerford."

The girl straightened up, a strange look like relief flashed across her beautiful face, the fear died out of her eyes.

"You think I did it?" she murmured.

Macquillan smiled grimly.

"I am inclined to be of that opinion," he replied.

Old Elinore tottered to her feet and turned indignantly upon Macquillan.

"She nebber done no dreffful thing lak dat," she cried. "Honey," turning to Lorine, her voice beginning to quaver, "why don't you speak up and tell dat thar man you nebber kill Marse Mahshall?"

Lorine went up to the old woman and put her arms tenderly about her.

"You mustn't grieve about me, dear," she said.

She kissed Elinore's wrinkled cheek, then turned quietly to Macquillan.

"I am ready to go with you," she said.

"You jes' wait till I send fo' Marse Eugene," said Elinore. "He nebber gwine to let dat man take you 'way, no, indeedy!"

Again a look like fear leaped to Lorine's eyes.

"No! No!" she cried. She turned almost wildly to Macquillan. "Take me away! Take me away!"

CHAPTER IX.

"GENE!"

Eugene started and turned. He had been standing at the window in the living-room gazing in the direction of the quarters, a yearning look in his eyes. He gazed blankly at his young wife as she stood, her eyes drooping, her cheeks softly flushed with pink. Haunted by the beautiful, passionate face of Lorine, saturated with longing for the red beauty of her mouth, the touch of her arms about his neck, Dorothy's tenderness, her white-and-pink wax-doll beauty made no appeal to him.

"I came to find you, dear," she said, a little plaintively. "I was so lonely."

He felt a throb of compunction. He had been absorbed by thoughts of another, and had almost forgotten his bride of a day. He had fulfilled his brother's wish, he had married Dorothy, but it did not end there. He must make her happy.

He smiled a little and drew her gently to him. Her slim arms went up and clasped his neck.

"Ought I allow myself to be happy?" she murmured. "Isn't it heartless?"

He shook his head.

"No," he replied, touching his lips lightly to her blonde hair. "He wanted you to be happy."

She sighed contentedly. The next moment she drew away from him. The door had opened, and old Elinore stood on the threshold. Eugene stared at her amazedly. It had been many years since Elinore had left the quarters. She came slowly forward, leaning heavily on her thick, knotted stick. In the center of the room, she paused, looking at Eugene.

"Dey's done tuk Lorine 'way, young massa," she said.

Eugene started.

"Took her away? Where?"

"Dey 'lows she done killed Marse Mahshall, and dey done tuk her 'way to jail," Elinore explained, drearily.

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A startled exclamation broke from Dorothy. Eugene stood white and still as tho turned to stone.

"I lubs dat chile," said Elinore. "She am booful as de sunlight, and her voice am sweet lak music. It am bery lonesome at de cabin. Won't you make 'em bring Lorine back, young massa? She nebber done shot de massa."

Still silent, Eugene started toward the door.

"Eugene, where are you going?" asked Dorothy, frightened by his pallor and his strange silence.

He stopped and looked back at her.

"I am going to find out what it means," he replied mechanically, and passed out of the room.

Old Elinore nodded her head contentedly.

"I reckon de young massa bring Lorine back," she said.

"Why do they think she did it?" asked Dorothy.

Elinore did not appear to hear her. Leaning heavily on her stick she was absorbed in gazing around the room.

"Mo'n sixty yeahs sence I lef' de quartahs and come up fo de big house," she murmured. "Dat was a bery long time ago, but I 'members it same as tho t'war yest'day. It war a sad and sor'ful day to me."

She moved toward the door very slowly and very feebly.

"You must rest before you go back to the quarters," exclaimed Dorothy, starting after her.

Old Elinore shook her head.

"I kyant stop, I'se gotter git back to de cabin. I don't want dat chile to come home and not find me thar."

"Then let me send Nancy with you," said Dorothy.

Old Elinore looked at her with grave dignity.

"Don't you bodder 'bout old Elinore, young mistis. De Lawd gwine to guv her de strength to git back to de quartahs." And Dorothy let her go.

Restlessly, Dorothy awaited the return of her husband. Unable to remain quiet, she wandered about the house, wondering, perplexed. She could think of no possible reason why Lorine, the octoroon, should be arrested for the murder of her master.

Dorothy was standing on the veranda about sunset when Eugene rode up. Dorothy uttered an exclamation when she saw his horse. The beautiful dappled gray mare was bathed in sweat, and her sides were heaving.

"Oh, Eugene, why did you ride her so hard?" cried Dorothy, reproachfully.

He swung himself from the saddle and stood looking at the horse. His face was white and strange.

"I didn't know I had ridden so hard," he murmured. He turned to a stable boy who had come up to take the horse. "Give her a good rub down, Levi," he said.

"Ya'as, massa." The darky was staring at the horse. His young master was devoted to the mare, and it was very unlike him to abuse an animal.

Eugene passed into the house. Dorothy followed him. He entered the library. The room faced the west and was bathed in a lurid crimson light from the setting sun. It lay on the dark furniture like splashes of blood. Eugene paused shrinkingly. Dorothy touched him on the arm.

"Eugene!" He turned and looked at her. "Tell me about that girl. I am wild to know."

He turned away and sank into a chair, wiping away the drops of sweat that glistened on his brow.

"She has been arrested for the murder of Marshall," he replied dully.

"Did—did she do it?" queried Dorothy.

"I—do not know," he replied.

CHAPTER X.

TWO weeks later, at the next convening of the circuit court in the county town, Lorine, the octoroon, was brought up for trial. On the morning that the trial began the courtroom was crowded. The case had created a sensation, and the people had flocked from all parts of the county to be present. The courthouse green was crowded by those who were unable to get into the courtroom.

Lorine sat in the prisoner's dock, her beautiful face pale and worn, but she appeared quite calm and composed. Near her sat her lawyer, Albert Amon, a youngish-looking man about 40 years of age. He was an able criminal lawyer, and had been engaged by Eugene Hungerford to defend Lorine. He had very little hope of clearing the slave girl. The circumstantial evidence was strong against her, and she herself had given him the impression that she was guilty. She had not admitted her guilt, but she had never once denied it.

There was a stir in the courtroom as Eugene Hungerford and his young bride entered. A slight change passed over the prisoner's face. A touch of color crept into her cheeks for a moment, a quiver passed over her lovely lips. She flashed a quick glance at Eugene, then her eyes drooped and the color faded from her cheeks. She sat very still, her slender hands locked together on her lap.

Seats had been reserved for the Hungerfords near the prosecuting attorney. Mrs. Hungerford, with her blonde hair, blush-rose cheeks, and blue eyes, looked very pretty in her somber attire. Eugene Hungerford had changed. He looked haggard and white, and the boyish look had gone from his face. He seemed years older. His face reflected nothing of the happiness that radiated from that of his young wife. Despite her mourning dress, she made the one touch of brightness in the hushed and somber room where the tragedies of so many lives had been enacted.

The commonwealth attorney opened the case for the State. He charged the prisoner at the bar, Lorine, a negro slave, with the murder of her master, Marshall Hungerford, by shooting him on the morning of August 18th.

"Prisoner at the bar, are you guilty or not guilty?" asked the judge.

Eugene, who up to that time had studiously avoided looking at the prisoner, now turned his eyes upon her. During the two weeks that had passed since her arrest, he had deluded himself with the belief that his love for her was dead. But one glance at the beautiful face, and the old tenderness and passion rushed over him. He knew that he loved her still, and he feared he would love her even tho it were proved that her hands were red with the blood of his brother.

"God help me!" he murmured wretchedly. "God forgive me!"

All eyes were turned on the prisoner. She made a movement to rise, but her lawyer laid his hand on her shoulder, pushing her gently back into her seat while he arose.

"On behalf of the prisoner, I plead not guilty, your honor," he said.

The first witness called for the prosecution was the old slave, Elinore. Supported on one side by her daughter, Nancy, and on the other by the darky, Elias. Elinore was led to the witness stand. She appeared very feeble, but her eyes were bright and defiant.

"Your name is Elinore, you are a slave belonging to the Hungerford plantation?" began the prosecuting attorney.

"Ya'as, sah."

"The prisoner has lived with you in your cabin since she was bought by the late Mr. Hungerford, your former master?"

Elinore glanced at him suspiciously and replied cautiously:

"Ya'as, she done libed wid me."

"You knew that your master, Mr. Marshall Hungerford, wanted her at the big house, but that she was unwilling?"

Old Elinore hesitated a moment before replying:

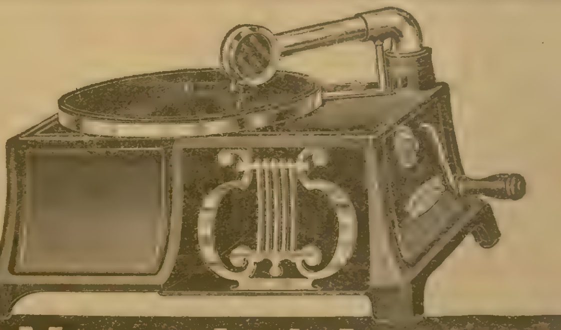
"Ya'as, I knowed it."

"On the morning that Mr. Hungerford was murdered the accused was away from the cabin, was she not?"

Elinore did not reply. The commonwealth attorney repeated his question.

"Say, Mr. Lawyer Man," Elinore looked straight at him, as she spoke, "is you tryin' to git me to say t'ings that gwine to hu't dat gal, Lorine?"

There was a ripple of laughter thru



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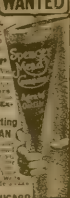

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the courtroom. The commonwealth attorney was, for the instant slightly nonplused.

"You are put on the witness stand to answer whatever questions are asked you," he replied sharply. "And to answer them truthfully."

"I ain't gwine to answer no quéstions 'bout Lorine," declared Elinore, doggedly. "So 't'ain't no use fo' you to be axin' me."

And from that determination the commonwealth attorney was powerless to move her. Persuasion, threats, nothing availed.

"You kin put me in prison ef you wants to," she declared, unmoved. "I'se bery ole and my time am short. I'se willin' fo' to die in de jail befo' I gwine to say one word to hu't dat gal."

The stately, white-haired judge leaned forward and addressed the commonwealth attorney.

"Let that woman go," he said, a touch of feeling in his voice.

"But she's one of the most important witnesses for the State, your honor," protested the commonwealth attorney. "She ought to be made to testify."

The judge smiled.

"You cannot force her."

"Then she should be punished."

"No," declared the judge, with quiet firmness. "I dismiss the witness."

As she arose to leave the witness stand, old Elinore dropped the judge a courtesy.

Police - Detective Macquillan was then called to the witness stand. He testified to what old Elinore had told him.

"She said that on the morning of the murder the prisoner had gone out to gather cowslips to make wine, but that she did not bring any back. I examined the ground where the body was found; it was strewn with cowslips. The prisoner told old Elinore that Marshall Hungerford was lying dead in the maple grove. That was at a quarter to twelve and the body of Marshall Hungerford was not discovered by the darky, Elias, until twelve o'clock. While I was in Elinore's cabin the prisoner came in. From what I had learned, I considered myself justified in arresting her."

"Did she make any denial of her guilt?" asked the commonwealth attorney.

"No, but she showed great fear when I arrested her."

Macquillan left the witness stand, and the commonwealth attorney called the prisoner to take the stand. There was a breathless hush in the courtroom as she quietly obeyed.

"You went out on the morning of the murder to gather cowslips?" began the commonwealth attorney.

"Yes."

"What became of those you gathered?"

Amon, the prisoner's lawyer, was on his feet in an instant, protesting.

"I object, your honor."

The judge sustained the objection.

"How did you know at quarter to twelve o'clock that Marshall Hungerford had been shot?" The commonwealth attorney fired the question at the witness.

Again the lawyer for the prisoner put in a vigorous protest, insisting upon the withdrawal of the prisoner from the witness stand. Again he was sustained by the judge.

"It is your business to prove the prisoner guilty, not to seek to make her incriminate herself," he admonished the prosecuting attorney.

Eugene Hungerford was next called to the witness stand. He was asked if he knew of his brother's intentions in regard to the octoroon. He replied in the affirmative.

As Eugene took the stand, Lorine had flashed upon him a single look, a look like fear, then she sat very still, her eyes lowered.

"Were you aware that the prisoner did not regard with favor your brother's intentions?" Eugene was asked.

There was a moment's hesitation,-then he replied, guardedly:

"Yes, I had heard my brother say so."

Court was then adjourned until afternoon. Eugene and his wife going to a hotel for dinner. In the lobby of the hotel they were joined by Doctor Latane, a young physician, a friend of Eugene's, tho some years his senior. Doctor Latane was a specialist in neurasthenia, or nervous disorders. Eugene invited him to dine with them.

"I was in the courtroom this morning," he said, when they were seated in the dining-room of the hotel. "I am much interested in the trial of your slave girl." He paused, then added, with a touch of regret, "I am afraid that she will be found guilty."

"Afraid?" exclaimed Dorothy, rather indignantly. "Don't you think she should be punished for her crime?"

"I do not believe that she is guilty," declared Doctor Latane.

Eugene looked at him quickly.

"The circumstantial evidence against her is very strong," he said.

Doctor Latane nodded.

"Yes, but I have studied the girl closely, and I do not believe she shot your brother. She may have seen the crime committed, but I am positive she did not do it herself."

Eugene sat gazing at the physician with drawn brows, his fingers nervously crumbling the bread beside his plate. Dorothy smiled incredulously.

"If that is so, why doesn't she tell who did the deed?" she exclaimed.

"Perhaps she is trying to shield the murderer," replied Doctor Latane, thoughtfully. "She may have had a lover who killed Mr. Hungerford because of jealousy."

Eugene shook his head, a faint smile drifting over his lips.

"You are entirely wrong about that," he declared.

Doctor Latane did not pursue the subject. Later, when he and Eugene were alone for a little while in the lobby of the hotel, Doctor Latane observed him attentively and said:

"You are not looking well, Eugene. Nerves troubling you?"

"I suppose it is due to nerves. I am troubled with loss of memory," replied Eugene. "I sometimes forget what I did—where I was at a certain time."

"How long have you been like that?"

"Only since my brother's death. But here comes Dorothy. Don't say anything about it before her."

Dorothy joined them, as Doctor Latane remarked, quietly:

"I'll come out to Hungerford Manor and have a talk with you."

They left the hotel and crossed over to the courthouse. The courtroom was again crowded. The prisoner had been brought in, and in a few minutes the judge and the two lawyers entered.

Eugene Hungerford was called to the witness chair.

"When did you last see your brother alive, Mr. Hungerford?" asked the commonwealth attorney.

"About ten o'clock on the morning of the murder, as he was about to leave the house to go squirrel hunting."

"What did you do that morning? How did you spend your time?"

Eugene did not immediately reply. A strained, distressed look came into his eyes.

"I do not - remember," he said at length.

The commonwealth attorney glanced at him questioningly. Doctor Latane leaned forward a little and watched him. The prisoner gavo him a swift, terrified glance, and sat almost cowering in her chair. Her lawyer glanced swiftly from her to the witness, and suddenly became very alert. The commonwealth attorney did not press the question.

"I have finished," he said, and inquired of the lawyer for the defense if he wished to question the witness.

"I will put Mr. Hungerford on the stand later," was the reply.

Eugene looked white and exhausted. As he sat down, he leaned toward Doctor Latane and said, with a wan smile:

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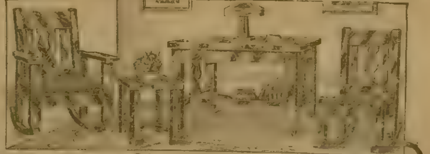

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"You see what I mean. I have never been able to remember how I spent the morning of the murder."

Doctor Latane nodded gravely.

The rest of the afternoon session was taken up by the testimony of the Hungerford's family physician, Elias, and young Mrs. Hungerford. Court then adjourned until the next day.

Amon accompanied the prisoner back to the jail. He turned upon her abruptly as soon as they were alone in her cell.

"See here, my girl," he said, watching her closely, "I don't believe you killed Marshall Hungerford. But I believe you know who did, and are shielding the murderer."

For an instant, she shrank, then she faced him fearlessly, a smile on her lips.

"I killed Marshall Hungerford," she declared calmly. "I met him that morning in the maple grove where I had gone to gather cowslips. He tried to force his love on me. I shot him."

She paused and looked at him with steady, unwavering eyes.

He looked at her, perplexed, uncertain.

"I don't know whether you are telling the truth or not," he said. "But truth or lie, I know you'll stick to it."

CHAPTER XI.

THE lawyer for the defense had finished his speech and sat down. He was conscious that, in contrast with the forceful, convincing speech for the prosecution, it had sounded stilted and labored. The judge charged the jury. The jury passed out. There was a stir in the courtroom, but as the judge and lawyers remained seated, no one went out. The accused's lawyer moved restlessly, and frequently wiped his brow with his handkerchief. He was evidently very nervous. The prisoner was very pale, but she was perfectly composed. There was no one present from Hungerford Manor. Doctor Latane had been present when court opened, but had been called away.

Hardly half an hour had passed when the jury entered.

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you agreed upon a verdict?" asked the judge.

"We have," replied the foreman.

"Is the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty."

Several hours later the commonwealth attorney was seated in his office with Police-Detective Macquillan.

"You showed great cleverness in getting at the bottom of that murder," observed Russell. "Eugene Hungerford should reward you liberally."

"Well, it was rather a neat job," admitted Macquillan. "There can be no question of the girl's guilt tho the evidence is circumstantial."

"Oh, she's guilty all right," declared the commonwealth attorney.

The door opened and Doctor Latane came into the office. Macquillan arose.

"Don't go, Mr. Macquillan," said Doctor Latane. "I have some news to impart which I think will interest you." Macquillan sat down. "I understand that Lorine, the octoroon, has been found guilty."

The commonwealth attorney inclined his head.

"Yes."

"The girl is innocent. Marshall Hungerford was shot by his brother, Eugene Hungerford," said Doctor Latane.

The two men stared at him.

"On what grounds do you make such an assertion as that?" asked the commonwealth attorney.

"Eugene Hungerford has confessed."

"If that be true, then he should be at once taken into custody," exclaimed Russell.

Doctor Latane smiled.

"Eugene Hungerford has gone to a higher tribunal. He is dead."

"What?" cried Russell.

"There was an accident when he and his wife returned to Hungerford Manor yesterday. They were thrown from the carriage. Mrs. Hungerford escaped with a few bruises, Eugene was thrown on his head and fatally injured. He did not recover consciousness until this morning. Eugene Hungerford killed his brother in a frenzy of rage, and when he realized what he had done the shock brought about a total loss of memory. The blow on his head restored his memory, and he made a confession. He was the lover of the girl, Lorine. On the morning of the murder he came upon the girl struggling in his brother's arms. She broke away from him. Marshall started after her. Eugene caught up Marshall's rifle, that was resting against a tree, and shot him."

At the big house Eugene Hungerford lay white and still in his coffin, and his bride of a few weeks mourned for him with an anguish in which there was neither alleviation nor hope.

In her cabin at the quarters, old Elinore lay dying, a smile of peace on her face.

"I knowed de good Lawd wouldn't let me die widout seein' yo' face ag'in, honey," she said to Lorine, who knelt beside her.

The stars were shining in the heavens when Lorine gently disengaged her fingers from those of the dead and went and stood in the cabin door. She looked in the direction of the big house, her velvety dark eyes very sad, but with something of peace in them.

"Thank God, my darling, you are safe!" she murmured.

The End.

* * *

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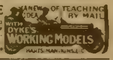

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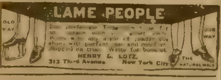

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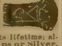

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Glen, the Boy Pilot

Or, Rafting on the Muskalong

By Milford Merrill

Author of "Riding the Logs"

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CHAPTER I.

GLEN DAYTON was in the back yard splitting wood when he saw a covered buggy drive up to the door of the cottage.

"Some one to see Aunt Eunice, I imagine," mused the young fellow, dropping the bit of his ax to the ground and leaning on the helve.

And then he thought of the queer hermit of Yellow Swamp, whom he had not seen since the day he stood on the cottage step while he, Glen, went to the rear of the house to get inside. The old man had disappeared that day, and no one had seen him since. Perhaps he was even now in the rig at the front of the house. Knowing that his aunt was absent for the day, caring for a sick neighbor, the boy resumed his work. If it was anybody to see him instead of his aunt he would hear the sound of his ax and investigate—and this proved true.

"Hello, Mr. Dayton!"

A stout, middle-aged man came round the house and confronted the boy. Glen recognized him at once as Andrew J. Dedham, millowner and dealer in pine lands, reputed one of the wealthiest men on the Muskalong River.

"Hard at work, I see," and the gentleman laughed.

"I have no time to be idle, sir."

"That's right. I like to see a young fellow industrious," smiled the big man of the up-river country. "Got a job for the summer?"

"I had one but——"

"I heard about it," chuckled Dedham, stroking his beard. "One has to provide for poor relatives, you know."

Glen's cheek flushed.

"You mean Ned Somers, of course. I believe he is a relative, a distant one. Well, I thought Mr. Weatherby hired me square enough, but, somehow, that Somers boy caused him to change his mind. I hope Ned'll make good."

"Do you honestly hope so?" a doubting expression on the big man's face.

"Of course I do. Why not?" asked Glen, indignantly.

"Because of the rather mean trick the fellow played on you. But that isn't what I came here to talk about. I have heard a lot about you. The old Indian pilot whom I used to have was drowned last winter up at the Straits. I am looking for another."

"A pilot?"

"Some one to run my rafts. I shall have both lumber and shingles this year, and it is a mighty particular job to run shingle cribs thru to the river mouth. I believe you can do it, tho."

Mr. Dedham sat down on a block of wood and picked his teeth with a pine sliver. He eyed the stalwart form of the boy with apparent satisfaction.

"What wages do you pay?" asked Glen.

"I paid old Joe sixty a month, but seeing it is you, I'll make it a hundred."

Plainly the millowner expected the boy to jump at his offer. Not so our Glen, however. He had worked for wages a good deal, but he had noticed that some of the wealthiest men on the Muskalong and at Oxbow got their start toward a fortune at jobbing. Now, the previous winter Glen had cleared the snug sum of one thousand dollars at breaking rollways for Shedd Weatherby of Oxbow. This money was now in the bank.

Since Mr. Weatherby, the Oxbow millowner and lumberman, had given the job he had promised to Glen to his nephew, Ned Somers, Glen was determined to make the most of the opportunities the money he had would give him.

At one time he thought of investing the cash in standing pine. Several had advised him to do this, but the boy hesitated, not fully decided upon the course he would pursue. There would be about seven months at piloting, when, of course, a winter in the woods would follow.

"I have counted on you, Glen——"

"I am sorry, Mr. Dedham, if you have. I can't accept your offer."

The big man gave a surprised whistle.

"What is the trouble? Isn't the pay big enough?"

"Quite enough, Mr. Dedham."

"Then what is the trouble?"

"I am sure you can find a good river pilot for less money, but I am not the one you need. I might name Indian Pete for one," said Glen, thoughtfully.

"He boozes too much."

"Then there's Blink Wade——"

"Even worse. I wouldn't have either one. No, Mr. Dayton, you are the chap I drove down to Oxbow to see. I know all about the work you did for Weatherby this spring. You did better than any man he ever had breaking rollways, and mind you, I consider rafting less difficult than that."

"Then why couldn't I do it?"

"Eh? What?"

Mr. Dedham broke the sliver he held short off, staring at Glen.

"That's what I said, Mr. Dedham," and the boy leaned his ax against the side of the woodpile. "I have decided that I won't work by the month any more. After Mr. Weatherby dropped me to give place to that fop, Ned Somers, I've been thinking. I want to make more than mere wages. You will have a lot of lumber and shingles to run down the river this season; more than usual, I understand?"

"Yes, that is true. I have added a second lumber mill, besides a shingle department. It'll take some business ability to take care of, I tell you."

"I'd like to try it, sir."

"What do you mean, boy, boss the rafting of my whole output?" asked the millowner, in plain astonishment.

"That's exactly what I mean, Mr. Dedham," nodded Glen coolly.

"Well, well, that's confidence for you! And yet——"

"Think it over, sir, and let me know what you will do," and Glen resumed his ax, as much as to say the interview was at an end.

"Of course, I will have to look elsewhere for a pilot if I let this rafting job to you."

"No, you won't. I'll include that in the job. You admit that I know every crook and turn of the Muskalong from Old Woman's Bend to Oxbow."

"Oh, yes, that is why—but, say, Glen Dayton!" exclaimed the millowner, smiting his hands together, "I've a good notion to take you up. Anyhow, I'll think it over and let you know within a few days."

With that Andrew Jackson Dedham quit the place, driving away like the wind. Glen continued to split wood, thinking deeply all the while, however.

Glen Dayton was an orphan, living in a pleasant cottage with his Aunt Eunice. He had worked hard nearly all his life, doing odd jobs here and there, till he was well up in his teens, when he began working in the woods. First as shanty choreboy, then as a chopper and sawyer, earning a man's wages, all of which he turned over to his aunt, who appreciated the unselfish devotion of her nephew.

A few weeks before we introduce him to the reader, he had completed the work of breaking several rollways for one Shedd Weatherby of Oxbow, and had, by introducing new methods, succeeded in making for himself the snug sum of money heretofore mentioned. This seemed a large amount of money to the orphan boy; it was, in fact, the largest sum the Daytons ever had.

Glen had pleased his employer so well that he had, on his coming from the rollways, offered the boy a place in his office at a good salary. Glen had accepted it, and Aunt Eunice and he were very happy at the bright outlook, when a boy named Ned Somers, one who affected to despise Glen because of his plain dress and sensible manners, induced the millowner lumberman to take him instead of Glen into his service.

It is unnecessary to go into particulars as to the methods used by Ned Somers to get himself into the good graces of Mr. Weatherby. No doubt Miss Myra, the rich man's small young daughter, who was proud and self-opinionated, had something to do with influencing his decision, since Ned was a handsome boy, and very agreeable when he tried to please. Besides, it was understood that Ned Somers was a distant relative of the wealthy Oxbow millowner.

Glen was bitterly disappointed over the loss of this position, which promised a chance for advancement. It was while contemplating how he should begin the spring and summer in order to make wages, that the millowner from Old Woman's Bend came to the rescue. Here was a possible chance to make another snug sum of money, which added to that already in bank gave Glen sudden new happiness.

When Aunt Eunice returned at the wane of day and heard of the visit of Andrew Jackson Dedham, she looked less pleased than her nephew thought she ought.

"It'll be a lot more money for us, Aunt Eunice," cried the delighted boy.

"Have you counted the cost, Glen?" she asked, in a low voice.

"The cost?"

"Exactly that, Glen."

"Surely I have. Everything one does costs something. I have enough money on hand to start this rafting business. I am sure a dozen men would perhaps be all I shall need. There's a chance, if I manage right, as well as I did breaking rollways, for me to add another thousand to the one already in bank."

Glen was nothing if not enthusiast. in his adventures. Aunt Eunice still looked grave.

"You misunderstood me, Glen," she said softly. "You have money enough to start in the rafting work, but I am afraid you haven't counted the cost in other ways. You know, with the rollway breaking you were paid by the month. If I understand your present plan, it is to take the contract for rafting the product of two mills for the season, you to bear all expense, to stand whatever losses may occur?"

"There will be no losses, Aunt Eunice."

"There are losses in every business, Glen," she went on, smiling gently. "It was the losses in business that [illegible]

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rupted your father and broke his heart as well. One must take these into account when venturing into unknown fields, as I am sure this rafting will be for you. There's always a chance for rafts to get smashed up among the logs——"

"In that case the owner of the lumber stands the loss, auntie."

"Well, you'd best have that understood, at least."

"Trust me for that, never fear," laughed Glen, who was very optimistic in his views of the future.

"Then there's this Andrew Jackson Dedham," pursued the aunt. "There have been whispers of his dishonesty."

"Don't you believe all you hear, auntie."

"I do not, of course. I merely warn you not to go into any new venture blindly."

"I shall not."

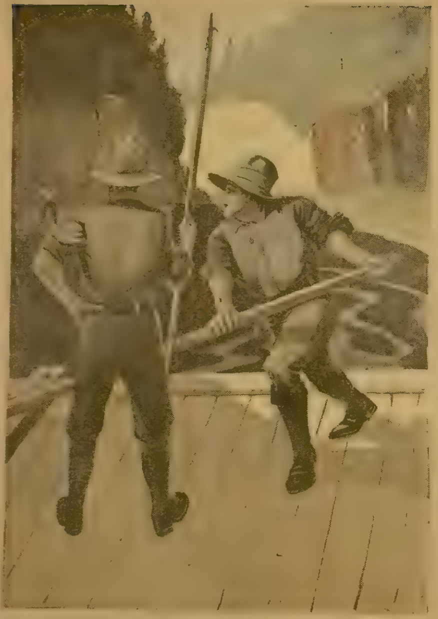
Two days later the boy breaker received a letter from the up-river mill-owner, requesting him to come up and see him. He stated in the letter that he had decided to accept his offer and would agree upon terms.

CHAPTER II.

GLEN hired a rig at the livery and drove to Old Woman's Bend. Mr. Dedham received him cordially, and the two were not long in coming to an understanding. The price per thousand feet was agreed upon, Glen to have the whole management of rafting and running. The boy from Oxbow may have wondered why the up-river millowner trusted him so fully, but he felt that he should make good that trust, and hoped to satisfy the rich lumberman in every particular.

Breaking rollways and rafting lumber were decidedly different propositions, and, as the boy afterward found, required a different set of thinking powers. Nevertheless, the boy was filled with enthusiasm for the work, realizing how much success meant to him, a splendid home for his dear Aunt Eunice, complete rest for her who had worked so hard striving to keep him in school during his knickerbocker days.

"I'll make good," he mentally avowed, "and Aunt Eunice shall live the last half of her life like a princess."



"Them pesky chaps have blocked the river."

Already many tall piles of lumber loomed up on the dock by the riverside. Glen procured a small ashen canoe in which he paddled all about the docks, looked after the stage of water, planned his rafting operations, then turned his attention to securing a crew of men.

"Hello, boss!"

As Glen grounded his canoe at the slip where Dires' Ferry landed he was greeted with the above friendly hail.

"Hello, yourself," quickly responded Glen, regarding the speaker quizzically—a short, squat figure of a boy-man, who seemed to have outgrown his clothes. Our boy hero smiled broadly when he looked into the wide face and big blue eyes.

"You're Glen Dayton?"

"You have said it."

"The very chap I want to see," and the wide face broke into a smile, showing strong, even white teeth.

"All right. You see me, don't you?"

"I just come from old Dedham."

"You are not very respectful."

"I'm sorry you don't think so. Want me to call you Mister Dayton, eh?"

"Nothing of the kind. I referred to your rude reference to Mr. Dedham. I think boys ought to speak respectfully of their elders."

The stranger laughed. He seemed highly amused at the sense of propriety manifested by the boy raftsman.

"We won't quarrel," he said. "I was brought up by my grandfather; he is a blacksmith, and not wholly a gentleman, so you can't expect much from a fellow like me, who never had a father."

"How about your mother?"

"Never knew her."

Glen scrambled ashore and took the stout boy by the hand.

"I am glad to meet you. I never knew a mother, either."

"We seem to be in the same boat then, Mr. Dayton——"

"You may call me Glen. All my friends do."

"All right, Glen. Now how about a job?"

"A job?"

"Yes. Old—er—Mr. Dedham told me you wanted men to raft lumber."

"That is right; I want men."

The boy raftsman ran his eye up and down the squat figure of his caller. He could barely repress a smile. The fellow was certainly unique in that he bore no resemblance to boy or man. His broad face, touched with freckles, wideset eyes, and jovial half-smile invited confidence. As to his age, he might be anywhere from 16 to 25. His broad body was shaped, it seemed to Glen, much like the map of Australia as he remembered it when he went to the Oxbow Academy.

"Well, what's the matter of me?" queried the other, a broad grin opening his moon-shaped face.

"Can you do a man's work?"

"Try me and see."

"I hate to make any experiments——"

"Look here!"

The stranger whirled and turned a cartwheel for several yards, then came back with several agile handsprings. Puffing a little, he tossed his heels in air and walked up and down the dock, exhibiting most wonderful powers of endurance so far as strength of arms was concerned.

"How's that, Mr. Dayton?"

"Splendid!" cried Glen. "You must have traveled with a circus?"

"I was two years with Walcott & Sopers Great Union Show. Heard of 'em?"

"Oh, yes, they were at Oxbow last year, but I didn't see you with them."

"Left 'em before that to go West. I was out among the Indians a year."

"I am afraid you are stringing me, Mr.——"

"Jack Adams at your service, Glen," and the big boy laughed heartily. "No, 'pon honor, I am dead square, sir. Let me show you another stunt."

With that Jack Adams produced an immense oxhorn from somewhere about his clothes, tilted it over his mouth, blowing a blast that echoed and re-echoed up and down the river in musical cadences that surprised and pleased Glen. Lowering the horn, the fellow touched his lip with a stubby forefinger, winking one eye very knowingly.

"Heard about the river raid last fall, didn't you, Glen?"

"You mean the time that John A. Beaver and his crew tried to cut the Oxbow millowners' boom and failed?"

"That's the time. I was along and blowed this horn to call the men together. We would have got the Oxbow fellows if it hadn't been for one man who turned traitor. The fellow had to run the country, else the river boys would have strung him up to a tree."

"Who was the man?" asked Glen.

"A measly cuss named Wade."

"Not Blink Wade?" cried interested Glen.

"Well, I reckon yes. Benner was his right name, but he'd such queer little green eyes he got the name of 'Blink,' which fitted the cur to a T. Did you know the scamp, Glen?"

"I should think so," responded the boy raftsman, memories of the log-breaking of the recent spring coming to him. "I did not know of the part he played in the John A. Beaver raid, else I shouldn't have employed him. He proved to be a bad man. You say he has run the country?"

"I've been told so."

"Well, I hope he'll stay away for good."

"He hadn't better show his head around where any of the Beaver boys are," voiced the broad Mr. Adams.

"What do you know about rafting lumber?" finally questioned Glen, who was desirous of getting together those who understood the work.

"Every bit there is to know, sir."

The speaker thrust his big oxhorn under his loose wamus, produced a wad of spruce gum, which he crunched between his jaws.

"No tobacco for me," he grinned, noticing the gaze of Glen fixed upon him. "I learned to like spruce gum when I visited one summer down in Maine. My home's in Waukegan, Illinois, but granddad's got relatives in Maine where we went visiting once. Ever been there, Glen?"

"Never."

"Well, you don't want to then. Have to sharpen the sheep's noses so't they can pick out the grass from between the rocks——"

"Now, see here," broke in the boy raftsman. "I haven't time to hear any more joshing today. I think you will do all right. Consider yourself hired. What is the first thing to do, Mr. Adams, when one wishes to build a raft?"

"Good Lord, don't you know?" grinned Jack Adams.

"I know some things, of course, but I haven't learned everything. I ex-

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pect you to help me out when I get stuck."

"I'll do that all right. Get out your team and we'll start for the woods."

"After what?"

"After grubs, of course."

"That's so. Come with me and we'll go at once to the woods."

Glen hired a man and horse team. Jack left his oxhorn at the mill boarding-house, procured an ax and a mattock, and joined Glen at the wagon. They drove to the nearby woods, where the three men put in half a day grubbing out small saplings, the roots of which they trimmed to a neat knob, cutting back the stem to about two feet. At night the men had enough prepared to fill the wagon-box.

It required three days to pick up his crew, at the end of which time Glen began his rafting operations. The grubs were used for the purpose of binding the lumber in one compact raft. A framework of plank was put together to form the foundation of the raft, the grubs being used at the ends of the plank, forming a framework perhaps a hundred feet in length. On this the lumber was placed crosswise, layer upon layer, many courses deep.

Men on the top of the high piles shoved the boards down to the waiting hands below that placed them in the raft. After completing enough courses to form a raft, boards with holes bored to receive the grub stakes were placed along each side the raft its whole length, these boards, or "binders," being secured by wedges driven into a side hack made in the grub stake. In this manner the rafts were made into solid floating masses of lumber. Across each end of the raft were pinned crosspieces of timber to which the guiding oars were made fast. It required a man at each end of the long raft to guide it down the stream.

There were many tortuous crooks between Old Woman's Bend and Oxbow, requiring a skilled hand at the oars to guide the raft past rocks and snags to a place of safety at its mouth.

"Would you like to take the stern of the first raft thru, Jack?" asked Glen of his moon-faced helper.

"Who takes the bow?"

"I shall the first trip at any rate," responded Glen.

"Then count me in at the stern," almost roared Jack Adams.

Glen had run the river from the Bend to Oxbow many times. From Indian Pete he had learned much, said Indian being considered the best pilot on the Muskalong. The boy raftsman had hoped to get Pete, but learned that he was at present in the employ of Mr Beaver, who owned mills farther up the stream.

"We will get an early start in the morning," was Glen's final order.

"So you are back here, Blink!"

There was an ominous ring in the voice of the speaker. Glen had just come down the hill from the home of Andrew J. Dedham, with whom he had a last word before starting his first raft down the stream. He saw two forms but ill defined in the early morning light. One he easily recognized as the squat form of the boy from Waukegan, the other he did not at first make out.

"Go long about your business, Moonface!" snarled a voice there was no mistaking as that of Glen's former malcontent rollway breaker, Blink Wade.

"Don't you call me moonface, you traitor!"

"Boys——"

The protesting voice of the boss raftsman had no power to prevent what occurred in the light of that last of April morning. The two rushed together. There was a snarl and a growl. The next instant a lank body went high in air, flying past Glen, over a steep bank, into the millpond above the big Dedham sawmill.

CHAPTER III.

GLEN stepped to the edge of the flume platform and looked over. If he had thought to assist Wade, he made no move to do so, since he saw the man crawling out upon a boomstick not far away, apparently quite able to care for himself.

"You don't like Mr. Wade, I see," said Glen, as he turned to meet his employe.

"That was a hard crack you gave him."

"He ought to have another," and Jack began moving down toward where his victim was clinging, wet and draggled, to the boomstick.

"No, Jack, let him alone," commanded the boy raftsman. "We haven't time to fool away here. I want to get the raft going as soon as possible."

"All right, boss. I'll meet him some other time."

Broad Jack Adams walked away beside his employer, his blue eyes still snapping from excess of anger.

"You seem to hate this man Wade?" from Glen.

"Hate him? Why shouldn't I? It was him that spoilt our plans against the Oxbow fellows' boom. We'd have cleared the river sleek and clean if it hadn't been for him."

"And got yourself into jail for your pains, Jack."

"Is that the way you look at it, boss?"

"I can't view it in any other light."

"Huh! You ought to hear old John A. Beaver talk. He'd convince yeh in a minute that we had the right of it. I guess you never did much rafting on the Muskalong, Glen Dayton."

"Not very much," admitted the other, with a smile.

"Well, when you run up against them fellows at Oxbow you'll sing a different song. They blockade the river half the season with sawlogs so that it's almost impossible to get rafts thru, and, by gob! they have no right to do it, Glen."

"Perhaps not, but we won't cross the stream till we come to it, Jack."

Half an hour later the two boys were on the raft, which was under way for the port at the mouth of the river, where the lumber would be loaded onto schooners for the Chicago market.

Jack Adams seemed handy at the oar. Glen felt that he had in this odd genius found a ready and efficient helper. The raft moved on its unobstructed way during the first hour, after which a tortuous turn in the river called forth considerable exertion on the part of the boy raftsmen. Here again Jack demonstrated his usefulness. He was as strong as an ox, possessing a fund of intelligence that surprised Glen. He was glad now that he had hired the queer Waukeganite.

In places the river narrowed till it was less than half its width at Old Woman's Bend. At such points the current became swift and dangerous. If he could get his first raft thru without mishap, Glen felt that half the battle would be won.

"What's that down yonder?" suddenly called Jack.

Glen saw, as did his helper, a mass of jammed sawlogs apparently completely blocking the stream.

"Hold hard!" shouted Glen, "we'll have to snub here!"

Jack braced himself and dipped his oar deeply, at the same time breasting it with all his strength. After a brief, sharp effort, the rear end of the raft was thrown against the bank.

"Snub around that tree, Jack!" shouted Glen, who now dropped his own oarstem and ran toward the stern. Jack was "holding hard" as Glen dashed up. The latter seized one end of a strong rope, and made it fast to the oar-pin, then sprang ashore with the other end of the rope, which he proceeded to toss about the trunk of a tree growing on the bank near the water.

Taking a couple of turns about the tree, Glen allowed the rope to slip little by little, easing the raft down to a stop within half its length. When the big body of lumber came to a full stop, the boy raftsman made his rope fast. He understood the necessity for allowing the raft some leeway, else an immediate stop might endanger the rope.

"All right, Glen."

"Everything's O. K.," responded Glen.

"What did I tell yeh, Glen?" cried the wide Jack Adams. "Them pesky Oxbow chaps have blocked the river. We're up a stump!"

"I trust not," answered the other. "I reckon this is pretty early in the season to block the Muskalong. Let's investigate."

"Of course we'll do that, but it won't do any good; we're booked to stay here till them fellows break their jam."

This prophecy did not prove true, however.

When the two boys reached the neighborhood of the log-jam they discovered a man, pike-pole in hand, standing on a boom at the entrance to a considerable creek. This boom seemed to have been placed here for the purpose of keeping logs out of the side channel.

"The Cedar Creek channel!" exclaimed Glen, brightening.

"That's what," agreed the wide boy. "I'd forgotten about that. I remember now that the Oxbow millowners agreed with John A. Beaver to keep this side channel free from logs during the summer. I didn't much think they would stand to that, tho, for a measlier lot never lived."

"Don't be too harsh in your strictures, Jack," advised Glen. "We will see what this man has to say."

Glen Dayton went up to the lumberjack who guarded the boom, inquiring as to the situation.

"That's what I'm here for, pard," grimly explained the man. "The Oxbow bosses says as how the river can't be blocked ag'in' them millmen upstream, so I stands guard here to see that things go right. Lucky you knew enough to snub yer raft above and come and find out the facts.

"A couple of raftsmen ran into this jam last week and had a sheol of a time gettin' thru. Took 'em three days, and the blamed old raft looked like it had been thru a tornado when they got clear of the logs."

"Didn't they make you pay damages?" queried Jack Adams, puffing out his cheeks.

"Damages nothing," snorted the lumberjack. "D'ye s'pose the fellers at the mouth is goin' ter knuckle down to a passel of small millowners up the river? Well, I guess not."

"Was it one of John A. Beaver's rafts?" from Adams.

"I reckon mebbe."

"Then you'll hear from him yet," declared the wide boy. "John's a whole team with a big dog under the wagon, don't you forget that for a minute."

"Oh, I shan't forget it," sneered the man. "I've heard of old John. He's allus in a fuss of some kind. Some day the boys down this way'll waylay him, tie a stone to his neck, 'n' sink him in deep water."

"There's got to be catchin' before hanging," snapped Jack.

"I suppose," said Glen, at this point, "that you will help us snub into the creek, sir?"

"I reckon I will if you'll be civil about it."

Glen assured the man that he had no thought of being uncivil, and the two boys had no trouble after that in getting their raft snubbed into the side channel, which the man on guard assured them was entirely free from logs thruout its entire length. Naturally the snubbing in process consumed considerable time.

"I think something ought to be done about this blockading the river," declared Jack Adams, when at length their raft was safely swung into Cedar Creek. "It takes up a lot of valuable time which these log owners ought to pay for."

"Never mind," said Glen.

"But I do mind," cried the short boy. "I call it an outrage——"

"Don't shoot off your mouth to me about it, you sucker, or I'll throw you into the drink!" growled the lumberjack, moving threateningly toward the speaker.

"Never mind," again called Glen. "There's no call for a quarrel. Let the other fellows settle this. We are only common raftsmen, you know."

At this Jack, to the astonishment of Glen, drew out his big oxhorn from beneath his blouse and blew a blast that echoed up and down the river like the trumpet call to an army. Twice, thrice the boy sounded his horn, then laid it down, wiping his mouth with his sleeve. His blue eyes twinkled, his broad, freckled face aglow with feeling.

"What do you call that tooting?" sneered the man.

"That's the signal for all good raftsmen to fall in, me boy," chuckled the lad from Waukegan. "Ever heard it before?"

"Sounds familiar, somehow."

"Was you here, or rather down at the Sand Flats last fall?"

"You bet I was, that time when we got the best of old John A. Beaver and his mill gang—yes, yes, by smoke! that's the time I heard that horn, young feller. Did yer blow it then, sounding a retreat?"

"I blew it sounding the charge," retorted Jack, swelling with pride.

"Come on, Jack. Cast off; we must be on our way," called Glen, who had resumed his place at the bow of the raft.

"Well, young feller," grunted the man, "take the advice of Jake Glatch, and never be caught in sich bad company ag'in."

The stern oar undid the rope and the heavy raft began to move. Jack sprang aboard and set himself to work

(Continued on Page 27.)

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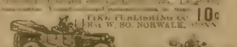

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Scorched Girl-Moths

:-: Or, :-:

Charmed by the Prince of Hearts

By B. S. Saunier

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CHAPTER XI.

HERE was the edge of the precipice. But neither the Prince of Hearts nor Anabelle's father, whose honored name had been outraged, nor Anabelle herself realized its real perils. They had all rashly played with the two-edged sword of love, and yet not even the older men of the three who had played the game took a thought of the yawning abyss toward which they had been lured.

And now blind rage possessed the father, who, with the heavy oar, would crush out the life of the young seducer. But Mr. Whitcome did not count upon Violet, who had called upon him to save her lover, and who now in terror rushed between the two men, only to receive the blow from the heavy oar. It was by the miracle of her heavy straw hat that her life was saved, for, as it was, she fell with a shriek and lay at their feet crumpled and senseless. A cry of horror escaped both men as they stood back and stared at the still, girlish form. And it was the Prince of Hearts that pointed an accusing finger at the older man.

"Now, you have killed her—you've gone and killed Violet!" he whined. "And upon my word you'll swing for it, too! It serves you right for making a mess of things for me. Blame it all—I s'pose I'll have to be a witness, and here I wanted to go home tomorrow. Say, but you rubes do make me tired." he added, turning wearily away as if he would quit the place.

But Mr. Whitcome had already examined Violet, and his look of relief was quickly replaced with another wave of rage over the puerile complaint of the precious brute.

"If I've killed her," Mr. Whitcome declared, leaping to his feet, "I'll finish with you, d—n your baby face—for I may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb! She's better dead than alive if she's like my girl!"

He leaped for Reginald's throat, and bore his victim to the ground. What his iron fingers and fists might have done to the heir of the DeVelt millions can only be imagined. He was prevented by a warning shout and a shrill whistle from Harvey, lately known as Harry Daniels during his intermittent visits in Ashville, and turning, Mr. Whitcome saw him running and waving his hands in an effort to prevent what he believed to be murder.

In a moment he leaped upon the struggling men, and, with a side tackle, pushed the older man aside and began pulling at the victim's shoulders.

"Say," he panted, "what do you think you are doing? Who is this girl you've killed? God! but you're in a nice fix, you are! I'll call the con, and hand you both over to the law, if you don't clear out of here, both of you," he ordered, knowing that it was necessary to clear the battlefield at once for the sake of his friend's salvation. Just at present they had the lake and beaches to themselves, but no one knew when a group of fishermen or pleasure seekers might happen along.

He lowered his voice as he thought of the danger of discovery.

"You two get out!" he warned again, and put violent hands upon Reginald DeVelt, otherwise "Jack Weldon," and turned him toward the town. "You two get out of here as quick as flesh can carry you. Begone," he added, as the youth gladly started away, "and you Whitcome fellow," Harvey added to the angry father, "look what you did!" He pointed to the still figure of the senseless girl. "Don't think I didn't see you strike her down, for I did see you. If she dies you'll swing for it," but his threat fell like chaff upon Mr. Whitcome, who made after the retreating form of "Jack Weldon."

"Only let me get at him!" he cried. "I struck the girl by accident, but I want to kill that other fellow, and I will."

He lunged off, but Harvey grimly got in front of him. "I guess not," he said, hedging the way. "You listen to me, Whitcome, and you'll be wiser for it. You want to know I'll see you in h—l before I see you get at that boy. Why, he's got millions behind him, you fool. What do you suppose would happen to you if you killed him—what? And where's your reputation—you a Sunday-school superintendent and churchman—bah! A nice church member you are, trying to kill somebody!" he bullied, parrying the blows of the angry fists that tried to knock him aside, and finally grasping the man firmly and forcing him to his knees upon the sand. "There, now, be still," he commanded, "and think what you are doing, Mr. Whitcome."

"She isn't dead," the older man declared, nodding toward Violet, "she's only stunned." Here he dropped his face in his shaking hands. "Oh, God—oh, God, my child is ruined! I'll kill that fellow if he is a millionaire—the lying hound!"

By this time Harvey had hastily examined Violet and found that she was returning to consciousness, and again he turned upon the stricken father. "Say," he exclaimed, assuming the role of a philosopher for the sake of giving his chum more time to make his getaway, "you fathers do raise some holler when your girls go wrong, I must say. Why don't you take care of 'em? You know a man'll go as far as he can, don't you? Didn't the Almighty make 'em that way? What you want to do now is to shut your mouth about what's happened and mind your own business. Get back to your store before the whole town is down here prying into this girl's injury. You hush this matter up, and I'll keep mum about her. But make a holler about it, and I'll witness that you were trying to kill an innocent girl for some reason or other. I'll leave it to your townsmen to guess what it was about. Savvy?"

There came a look of utter bewilderment at this subtle threat. Then Mr. Whitcome rose slowly to his feet, staggered, and muttered:

"The lying sneak! –the lying sneak!" He gazed up the path that his intended victim had taken. "If I ever see him again I'll kill him, wherever he is, no matter what happens to me afterward!"

Harvey began chafing Violet's hands. He brought water in his palms and bathed her brow, and Mr. Whitcome looked on dazedly, undecided and weak from his passion and grief.

"She's better dead," he muttered, glancing at her; "her honor's gone, and she's better dead."

"Leave her to me, old man, and get back to your store. And don't forget what I say—that mum's the word. Leave the girl to me, and I'll get some one to take her home. And you keep your mouth shut."

It was youthful advice. The older man refuted it. He still intended to kill the lying sneak that had brought about the dishonor of his house and name, and he started away, going unsteadily up the shallow bank, thinking only of revenge. He had the Boston address of "Jack Weldon," and he knew what to do and he would do it. Without needless delay he would bring swift judgment upon this young millionaire who had amused himself with an honest man's child, and then tossed her aside like a broken flower whose fragrance had no more charm for him.

He was thinking bitterly and relentlessly of this plan as he came into the main street and passed the mayor's cottage, set close to the picket fence that inclosed a yard of small dimensions, his furtive glance searching along the street for a certain handsome young man, when he heard:

"Why, hello, John! Jinks, but you look sickish!"

He turned. The little mayor was seated on his front stoop with his pipe unlit in his mouth.

"Hello, Van Horn," was the answer.

"Wait a minute," called the mayor, as the storekeeper was striding past, "wait a minute, John; I got somethin' to say." He rolled off his seat and came to the fence corner, and John Whitcome halted impatiently.

"I'm in a hurry," he explained.

The mayor held up a finger and drew out a long envelope from his shiny old long-tailed coat pocket.

"This here letter come today," he said, "and I thought you'd like to hear from Washington. It's a dead letter. I was writin' to Boston to get on the trail of that young sporty feller 'at's ben hangin' round here lately 'count o' that thare huntin' law he broke when he was chasin' that young faun up to the Neck the time we had the Old Settlers' picnic. You wa'nt there, I know, but we hevn't kep' the matter secret. You heerd tell of it, I guess. Well, he give me twenty dollars fer hush money, so I thought I could spend a little fer stamps. I wouldn't be tellin' this.

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COPIES WEEKLY.

GENTLE JABS

Method is the offspring of punctuality.

In most cases an engagement ring is a band of hope.

Some men make good by stepping in other men's tracks.

Time flies—and the leader of an orchestra can beat it.

Why does the self-made man never suffer from remorse?

Anyway George Washington didn't use his little hammer.

No matter how red a man's hair may be, he hates to lose it.

Bad news, like a soft boiled egg, should always be broken gently.

Much of the charity that should begin at home doesn't begin at all.

Great men are ordinary people with their understandings polished.

Many a man wastes time arguing about the religion he hasn't got.

Some men who were born to command lose out after they marry.

Any coward can get married, but it may take a hero to stay married.

Remember that the money you intend to save doesn't draw any interest.

Most men are willing to start something for the sake of an argument.

Seven quarts to the peck is the way some grocers measure their success.

If some men had to work in order to earn a living they wouldn't live very long.

The patches that decorate the trousers of a calamity howler are not on the knees.

When it comes to making angels of men the minister isn't in it with the doctor.

When it comes to stepping into a fortune no man objects to putting his foot in it.

The journey of life is tiresome—a man is out of breath when he reaches the end of it.

Two men trying to entertain one woman constitute a fair example of a silent majority.

Every woman looks forward to the time when she'll be in a position to boss some man.

It is said that G. Washington was so opposed to lying in any form that he refused to establish a weather bureau during his administration.

(Continued From Page 24.)

only I seen he was hangin' round your gal, and I thought I'd own up if 'twould save you from trouble with the scamp. He ain't got no house in Boston, by jinks. He give me a fake address, he did, darn 'im!"

Mr. Whitcome regarded the mayor of Ashville incredulously. It was unbelievable that the mayor could not know that he was cutting away the last ray of hope for revenge that he hungered for by giving so damnable a piece of information. It seemed as he stood there that he could feel the acid of his shame and the bitterness of his hate gnawing deeper and deeper into his soul. He could form no words for the mayor's gossipy satisfaction. He could only mutter:

"Is that so? Well, well, that's too bad, mayor, too bad!" and he strode off.

After all, what was there to do but to take Harvey's advice? Mum was to be the word—and a bitter, bitter silence. But if ever he did meet that lying hound he would kill him—he would kill him! His soul was poisoned with this promise made more bitter because he was forced to be silent, silent but never forgetting, never forgetting.

Back on the beach of the little lake the chum of this "fellow" was inventing some way of disposing of Violet. Harvey was resourceful enough, thanks to numerous scrapes at college, and altho the present case was a serious one, he felt that he could manage it. Violet was breathing regularly now, but was still unconscious. And, thinking that he would find some way of getting her into the hands of her friends, he left her lying upon the sand and started toward town. But, with what he might have named a good second thought, he halted.

"Well, am I the guilty man? Nixy. They'll want me to explain why she is hurt. Really, I have no taste for complications, and me on the eve of a trip to my own lovely home town. They'd hold me here if I tried to explain this affair. Reggie does get me into a lot of trouble—darn his skin! I won't stand for this, anyway."

He looked at his watch. He knew that the train for New York City would stop at the way station three miles distant in four hours. If he hired a man to take him there the whole town would be aroused over Violet's state before he could get away. He decided to "light out" and tramp it, as Reggie was doing at this moment, he knew. They would doubtless meet at the station and get safely off together.

"I hope that kid'll settle down now and be done with his girl game," he said, as acting on his own advice he strode off thru the forest, intending to zigzag his way around the town and thru the fields to the railroad.

He glanced back from a safe screen of bushes to the quiet form lying alone on the beach, just in time to see a group of boys emerge from the woods near her, and halting in amazement, ran toward the unconscious girl and begin trying to lift her.

It must have been an hour after this that Mrs. Lawrence, with her sewing basket at her side and her Bible open on the table before her, was startled by a knock. Rising hastily she opened the door to her neighbor Jamison. He had Violet in his arms and a look of concern was on his face.

"I don't know what's the matter," he said, as he laid her on the old couch. "She's dazed—sunstroke, maybe. I found her near the lake. Some boys called to me to come as I was going after the mail. I happened along just after they found her, and none of 'em knew what had happened. But anyway I thought I'd bring her home double-quick time and get a doctor if you say so."

Mrs. Lawrence, quite overcome with the sight of her child in such a state, was hovering over her with caressing hands and calling her name. She nodded wonderingly to Mr. Jamison's explanation and hurried out for a basin of water. Back again she began to bathe the pallid face.

"Violet—Violet, look at mother, my sweet! What is it, dear? What has happened?" she cried. "Tell mother all about it, honey."

Presently Violet roused herself and put her hands to her bruised head, her pretty eyes, all bloodshot, opened upon her mother's perturbed face.

"There she is as good as new," Jamison said, moving toward the door. "Sunstroke, I bet, Mis' Lawrence, don't you reckon? Well, I must be off, 'count o' harvesting, you know. Keep her head cool. Wife'll be over as soon as I tell her 'bout Violet," he said, closing the door in his haste before the last word was said, and leaving Violet under the ministering but agitated hands of her mother.

Slowly and with an agony of pain Violet began to remember what had taken place, and the memory sealed her white lips in a shuddering silence and agony that the tender touch of motherly fingers deepened, as her senses reeled with the awfulness of her fate. Must they know—the devoted ones who loved her better than life? Must she tell them? Never, never, never!—and consciousness left her again.

Violet awoke at the sound of her father's big boots on the floor.

"What's the trouble, mother darlin'? What's wrong with our baby? Violet sick?" he was asking. "Here, tell me all about it."

There was a murmur of explanation, and her father strode to the couch with his arm about her mother's waist, as if in his protecting love he felt the need of defending her from he knew not what.

"Why, Violet's white as a sheet, ma," he said, in instant alarm at sight of her. "I'll harness and get the doctor right away," and he was off to carry out his design when Violet dragged herself up despite the weight of pain in her head.

"Stop, father," she begged. "Stop—don't—don't get a doctor! Please—please don't—I don't want a doctor to see me!"

Her father strode back to her side amazed.

"What nonsense, child! You look like death, girl." He fondled her hands that lay in his horny brown ones as cold and as white as lilies. "I won't be long, and he can do more than we can. Be good, now, girlie," and he started away once more to do his will.

Violet sank back weak and sighing, "No, no, no!" Don't father! Forgive me if you can—I wish I could die—I've been—been—been betrayed! Mother, both please forgive me if you can!" Her voice sank to a whisper and again her senses left her unconscious before the stricken pair.

For the first time in his happy wedded life Mr. Lawrence forgot his mate as he halted under the staggering blow. His horny brown hands began clawing at the open collar of his blue cotton shirt, and he stared blindly, incredulously, about him with dazed eyes of blue, eyes like those of his child. Blankly he looked for his wife, and when his sight had cleared he saw that she had crumpled into her rocking chair near the table with the open Bible upon it.

He went to her. "Wife, I'm right here. We'll—we'll bear it together," he whispered over her bowed head. His man's arms fell about her comfortlessly but without reproach. Had he loved her less he would have blamed her for some obscure lack, but his life of devotion to her had found no cause for reproach, and he found none now. Her motherhood had seemed to him as perfect as did her wifehood. But for

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the moment as he bent huskily over her he seemed to have blotted out the child from his thoughts. "Dear," he whispered, "look up, ma—we can bear it now, can't we?"

It was then that the mother fell to shuddering and weeping on his sweaty shoulder, sobbing and shuddering helplessly and without tears, and it was the sound of her sobbing that brought Violet back to life. A moment she watched the two. It was with a child's instinct that she felt blotted out of their lives, a thought unbearable, unbelievable. She slipped to her knees, and with a painful effort crept toward them and buried her face in her mother's skirt.

"You can never forgive me, and I wish I was dead—I do! I wish I was dead!" she cried, and went unconscious again on the rag carpet at the feet of her parents.

CHAPTER XII.

NIGHT and a Puritan moon looking sternly down upon a sinning world, a distant I-told-you-so askance toward the swift retribution and tragedies of man. Trailing shadows, long and black, moved under the foliage that marked the Lawrence homestead. An ominous silence was there broken only by the complaints of unmilked cattle that waited supperless for the master. The horses stamped impatiently in their stalls. The poultry had gone to their roosts unremembered. A sense of desolation and neglect appeared to have settled down swiftly and unannounced upon the busy farmstead.

In the shadow of the old woodshed a form stirred its hands, fumbling with an old rifle, not so old but that it glittered as it came into the moonlight, not so old but it could do proper service, not so old but it could glitter in the glancing light as did the eyes of the man who carried it. For by this time Violet's father had learned the whole story of her fatal love for "Jack Weldon," our young Prince of Hearts, his double dealing and his empty, lying promises.

"Boston, hey?" muttered the outraged father, with an oath, "I'll Boston him, by Heaven, I will!" he vowed, striding toward the pasture, not to care for his stock, but to catch his mare, his one riding horse, and be off for the manhunt. "So he's from Boston, is he? Well, I'll Boston him, by the God that made us, I will!" he swore, and climbed over the bars with the gun in one hand and a bridle in the other, which last he had taken hastily from the stable.

The mare that he was to ride was nestling with her colt against the worn shoulder of a last year's haystack, and as he approached she gazed at him in wondering protest. Something of the serene night was in her look, a vengeance-is-God's look was in her protest. Impotently the man stared at her, reading the message, its truth sinking deep. His knees weakened under it, and he sank quaking, shivering before the specter tread of the coming years, the dishonored, hopeless, dreary coming years.

"God! it's too late now—too late, to do anything now!" he cried out, as his beardless lips touched Mother Earth's throbless bosom. "What use to kill—to add another crime to his? But God, do you send him to hell for this—and don't let him go—don't let him go!"

He lay a long time with his forehead in his hands, his rifle and the needless bridle at his side, until he felt the mare lipping at his shoulder with an animal's inquisitive sympathy. The cattle gathered in a wondering circle, before he formed definite conclusions over Violet's situation.

"So Whitcome's sent his girl off," he thought, when he grew calmer, "but Vi—little Vi—my pretty babe—it would be another crime if we cast her off to make her own way as she can. She'd sink lower and lower, and oh, God! I can't cast her off, can I? No, no! I'll sooner sell out and go away, go some place and start in anew—with ma and—and Violet. I'll do that. I'll tell ma, God!" He sat up then and grimly took in the circle of cattle hungering for his attention, the colt, suppered and playful, scampering off from him and from his appeasing gesture.

"I'll talk it over with ma," he told them. "I'll have to turn you off—all of you," he declared sorrowfully, "and God knows I never thought to see a reason for doing it, but it's come—it's come!"

He got up wearily. "Never mind," he said, with a comforting accent, "it's better so than what Whitcome's done." He picked up the rifle with a groan and lumbered off in the van of the eager herd. "And he not caring a penny what happens her. Pride, pride, pride!" He seemed to trample his own pride under foot at every step. "Pride, pride, pride!" And with its increasing oblivion his tenderness for Violet became greater. "But what will Whitcome's girl do with herself now?" he asked, when he had brought the milk pails and set himself to the relief of his cows, "what on earth? Where under God's heaven can she go except down hill with every man and woman giving her a shove toward hell? And I can see her slipping, slipping, right now!"

* * * * *

The back door of the Whitcome home was open when Anabelle stealthily entered after her father had told her to leave his roof. She felt safe here for a hasty hour, and a few furtive glances about told her that the house was still empty. Her eyes were red with weeping, but she dabbed them with face powder, and found a veil to wear over her hat. Then she put a few things in a bag, and some clothing in a suitcase. Having donned a wool skirt and jacket to match, she stood a moment thinking, hesitating, greatly tempted over the money question. In a moment her eyes hardened and her lips likewise grew firm and white.

"The gold-piece," she said, "I'll take that."

Swiftly she went to her father's drawer and took out the jewelry box containing the gold-piece that "Jack Weldon" had bought the fatal red ribbon with, and slipped the coin in her purse. "It will take me to New York," she said, "and when I get there I can easy find work—easy enough. And I'll do as he said—he'll never see my face again." She choked here and swallowed hard. But she forced back her emotion, and finding some house money in the kitchen drawer, put that in her purse along with the gold coin. Then she drew shut the door and fared forth.

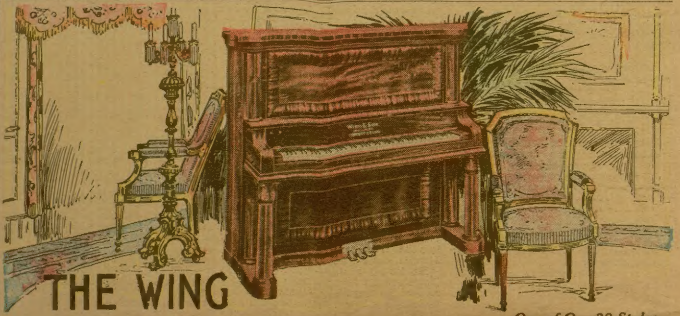
By careful maneuvering she escaped being seen by any of the townspeople, and eventually reached the little forsaken way station three miles distant in time to climb aboard and sink into a seat with a sigh of weary satisfaction. Only two other passengers took the train from here, two young men who grasped the railing and swung themselves aboard as the train was leaving the end of the platform. Entering the smoker, they, also, sank into a seat with a relief that neither tried to conceal when the train was under way.

"By gee!" gasped Harvey, whose disguising name of Harry Daniels had already slipped from him as Ashville was left behind, "that was your little sweetheart that got on the train just ahead of us. I know her by the blue-black hair."

Reginald, whose disguise-name had also slipped from his thoughts with past events, shrugged his handsome shoulders and relapsed into moody silence. He felt that the girl had got him into a bad mess. He was not sure that he was out of the reach of her enraged father and he gave a hasty glance among the smokers to make sure that he was not pursued even here. By and by he might be able to laugh about the mess that he had been in, but he was not ready for levity just yet.

"Will you go in and—er—and speak with her, kiddo?" Harvey inquired, as he lit a cigarette.

"I should worry!" growled Reginald, with his hands in his pockets. "She's to blame for the whole thing—little fool! What'd she lead me on for, anyway? But say," more alertly, "I owe you a lot of gratitude for coming to my assistance. Gee! the old man would



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have knocked my block off with that oar if you hadn't come along. He was some fighter. Thanks awfully. If dad knew it he'd leave you a legacy and a hero medal."

"I'm rather sorry for the girl," suggested Harvey, waving the other topic aside. "She's thrown out, isn't she?"

Another shrug. "I should worry—she's got a good education, and that's as good as a bank account anywhere. But thanks for helping a feller out of a hole, anyway, old pal. I'm not likely to forget——"

"Chuck it!" Harvey cut in irritably, and puffed away in silence for a few moments. "Say," he said, "I'll dare you to go thru the car where she is."

"Go yourself," Reginald replied surlily, and began rolling a smoke for himself, "I'm so occupied here that I can't get away."

"You're a blooming heathen, all right," grinned Harvey.

"Thanks. I take your adjectives kindly since they come from my preserver," Reginald retorted and settled himself for a comfortable smoke with his head resting upon the plush cushion of the seat and his eyes intent upon the landscape now resplendent in the gorgeous rays of the setting sun.

There was an irritating silence that neither broke for a half-hour. Then Reginald, as if roused by the flash of the lights that were turned on as the day faded, made an ingratiating attempt to whitewash himself.

"I wonder where the girl is taking herself to, anyway—on this train. I'm hoping it isn't New York. She never said she had relatives there. I'm real interested to know."

"Go and ask her about her plans, then," Harvey said.

"I can't. There's a gulf between us now and no bridge," Reginald complained, feeling uncomfortable.

A prolonged silence fell again.

When the berths were made up Reginald was in a better mood, and attempted a tune which Harvey refused to join, altho he was urged.

When the train pulled in at the New York station, a young girl with her veil drawn over a dark cloud of hair that framed a fair, sad face descended among a confusing whirl of passengers, train officials, and cabmen, and stood there in a dazed and bewildered state until, as she glanced about in the roar and confusion to seek, if she could, some necessary information concerning a lodging-place, she was approached by a flashily dressed woman, who smiled in a comforting way as she hurried forward.

"You are looking for friends?" she asked.

"Yes," Anabelle replied slowly, "that is—oh, could you tell me where I could get a room and board, not very expensive, but——" Anabelle searched the woman's face for sympathy, her heart fairly aching for a friendly look and word of advice.

"There, you poor child," the woman replied ingratiatingly, "of course I can. You come with me and I'll show you the very place—cheap, and good board, too. This way—I'm going there myself."

She led the way toward a taxi that was standing outside of the inclosure, and as the two women went out together, Reginald and Harvey, who had noticed the meeting, exchanged significant glances.

"You see," Reginald said, with considerable satisfaction, "she has wired to a friend. She knows what she's about, all right, never fear. Come on and get out of here," he urged hastily. "Much you have worried—and believe me, you've had a narrow escape. I won't promise to help you out of any more tangles, now I'm telling you, Reggie. Next time you'll get plugged by some of the lovers you are so fond of cutting out."

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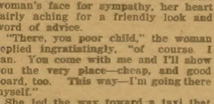
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Reginald responded by beckoning a taxi and climbing in. As far as his comfort was concerned he had wisely disposed of his "affair" with Anabelle Whitcome. But Anabelle herself, started as she had been by a step downward, and now innocently trusting to fate that was about to lead her still further downward, was enjoying her first ride in a taxicab.

The ride was a source of wonder as well as pleasure to the young girl. Except for the minor chord of evil reproach that she had struck, the multitude of wheels, of hoofs, of people, and their haste to get to their destination, and the roar of the traffic and the ease with which the taxi-driver made his way thru it, all gave her an alert and almost nervous interest outside of her window.

Mrs. Van Sleet asked but few friendly questions. A girl from the country, alone in a great city, seeking a room and cheap board, needed to answer but few questions. Her story is too common, her answers too often monotonously the same. The elder woman watched the girl with a silent assurance not in the least disconcerting to Anabelle.

It was Anabelle's commercial worth that formed the asset in the eyes of Mrs. Van Sleet, who made mental comments concerning the blue-black hair, with its natural wave, the clear, pink-and-white skin and regular features and the alluring dark eyes, now somber with something sad, daring, reckless, defiant.

The taxi stopped before a house in the middle of a block of houses built compactly of dreary white stone with steps running up to a door on the second floor, a door of brown paint from which bits of white could be seen where the brown had chipped off. Anabelle was too weary with her travels and her troubles to notice details, or even to understand the commiserating glance that the cabman gave her as he took his fare from Mrs. Van Sleet. She noticed that there were double doors at which they rang for admittance, one of which, opened by a slovenly maid, closed upon her with a clang that gave her a sense of dismay.

"Come right in, Miss Whitcome," her companion invited, with a gracious smile, and beckoned to a drawing-room within. "I know you need rest the first thing of all—rest, and a cup of tea."

They passed thru a pair of soiled portieres, and were met by several young women in kimonos—hardened women of the streets they were—some of whom were smoking cigarettes.

Anabelle, with her simple country traditions, shrank back at sight of their abandon, but Mrs. Van Sleet pressed her forward and introduced her to the circle of "boarders." She was received indifferently. No one rose to meet her and to take her hand. And they let her go without audible comment when Mrs. Van Sleet led to the hall stairway and said:

"I'll show you a room right away where you can have a nap and a bite to eat without meeting any one else. And afterward you can see about the work that you think you can do."

She was an affable woman, and Anabelle heartsick and greatly bewildered with her strange experiences, longed painfully to be taken to the heart of some great-hearted woman who would understand and who would help her. And with a girlish faith she believed that here she would—yes, here, perhaps, she would find just such a friend. She had no time to analyze the scene downstairs. At the end of the upper hall, after climbing two flights of stairs, Mrs. Van Sleet threw open a door and smiled a welcome.

"It isn't much of a room," she apologized, "but it is clean, and after you get work you can have a better one, perhaps—if you do well. But here you will get some sleep. I'd go right to bed, if I were you, dear, and at lunch time I'll have some one bring your tea."

Anabelle heard her explain that the other boarders were apt to visit around a good deal.

"We are social folks here," she said, with her hand on the knob, "you'll not want to be disturbed just yet, so when I go out I'll lock the door to make sure they don't come in."

She shut the door then, and Anabelle heard the key turn in the lock with another queer foreboding of something wrong. But she took off her hat and coat and loosened her clothing before the cheap mirror that was above the pine washstand. She had much pity for the girl in the mirror, who was pale and mentally distraught from the wounds that lover and father had inflicted. She was glad of a sanctuary, however doubtful, where she could collect her thoughts, where her wounds could have a chance to harden and heal, if they could. She sobbed on the coarse pillow in sudden soul-pain at her recent brutal treatment, but she fell asleep at last in the healthy weariness of youth, and forgot her childish wonder over the tragic events that had overtaken her with such relentless and cruel insolence. Beaten to earth she felt herself, yet so great was her faith in the world that her bounding youth had a vision of conquering in spite of all. And with her first waking thought came a flint-like hatred toward the father, who had cast her away. But the peaceful quiet of her home town she still abhorred.

Ashville itself was not stirred over Anabelle's troubles. There were good reasons why they were not fully aired, with her father on the ground to manage the case and preserve his "family honor."

Ashville lost the Lawrence family in less than three months after Anabelle went away. They had found a buyer for their farm, and sought sanctuary in New York itself, and they bade their friends a restrained farewell to go with their child into a new life far removed from the scenes of her temptation.

"Violet's attack of sunstroke has changed her," was the wondering comment of those who came to bid her good-by.

"But she's prettier than ever, I think," was the invariable reply, "and her color'll come back as soon as she gets her strength."

"Her father and mother behave as if she was their pearl of great price," was the comment that followed, "they look after her as if she was their heaven."

"Yes, and a fence around it," giggled the other commenter.

"Well, of course, Violet's the only child. She appears like that pretty little faun that Jimmie Lampson rescued from the hunters that day at the picnic. Its parents came and got it afterward, you remember? Well, Violet's folks are——"

"Dear," smiled Violet's school friend.

"As dear as dear can be," agreed the other, laughing.

This surely would have been the expression of public opinion had the public been admitted to the true facts in the case—the voice of the people being the voice of God, according to the old Latin proverb. The future of Violet, sheltered and protected by her loving parents, merged in the years to come into the dignity and joy of success.

But Anabelle's case became hopeless in the hour that her father ordered her to leave his roof. Ten years later her body, the wreck of her hardened career in New York City, was shipped back to her father, whose life had been blighted by the wily Prince of Hearts.

The End.

* * *

Still Single.

"Willoughby Waddle is back from California," remarked Mrs. Bomberger.

"Then there is a chance for the girls around here yet," said Bomberger. "There was a lot of weeping around here when he went out there. The young women here were all afraid he would get married before he got back. But the danger is now past. He is home again single.

"I'll tell you how it happened. Willoughby Waddle thought he would go West and grow up in that big wide country. He has a brother married out there.

"The brother has a ranch, and he took Willoughby out and showed him carrots as big as torpedoes and pumpkins as big as auditoriums, and bunches of grapes that weighed a ton. Will was impressed, being a man of large ideas.

"However, there was too much largeness there. It included even the people. In fact, Willoughby came home on account of the girls. He hadn't been there very long before the damsels got wind of it and came to call. There were three the first night.

"Willoughby wondered what was obscuring the light, and looking up he saw a girl stooping herself in thru the door. She was followed by two other equally tall apparitions. When they sat down their knees looked like piers. Their feet resembled suitcases. Their hands and arms were like steam-shovel cranes.

"They wanted Willoughby to go to a social. But Willy ducked. He was scared. He thought there might be an earthquake or a tornado, and that one of those girls might fall on him.

"Then some one proposed that they tango. Willy came near fainting with fright. Imagine dancing with a scaffolding like that! These young women could have picked Willy up by the back of the neck and hoisted him to some dizzy height and then dropped him."

"Any girl is liable to do that," remarked Mrs. Bomberger.

"Finally they got Willy to some kind of a social much against his will, and they began to play games. There were 'Clap Out' and 'Pillow' and such games where the girl is liable to sit on the young man's knee, and where there is some 'heavy, heavy hangs over your head' program, and where the players say 'What will please better?' and the answer is 'For Amelia Whopderrick to sit on Willoughby Waddle's lap.'

"That's why Will came home single."

* * *

Glen, the Boy Pilot.

(Continued From Page 23.)

ing his oar. Ten minutes later, after they had floated down beyond sight of the boom guard, Jack glanced down at his feet to note that his precious horn was not there. In his hurry to get the raft loosed he had forgotten his mouthpiece.

"By cracky!" exclaimed the boy, "that infernal Jake Glatch stole my horn!" He felt like again snubbing the raft and going back after the precious relic of other days, but Glen would not hear to it, telling him he would be able to reclaim it at another time.

When Oxbow was reached, his raft safely moored under a dock where the vessel loaders could get at it handily, Glen hastened up town.

He went first of all to the Lumberman's Bank. This he found closed. Consulting his watch, a silver affair of not much value, Glen saw that it was not yet six, at which time the early lumberwoods bank usually closed.

"I'll have to wait till morning, I suppose," said he.

Just then a man passing called to Glen.

"You can't get in there, my boy. Old Dan Brawl's bank suspended yesterday morning. It's in the hands of a receiver!"

Glen stared at the speaker, dumb with amazement. Where was his thousand dollars?

The continuation of this highly interesting story will be found in the Ledger issue of next week. Read it. If you are not a regular subscriber to the Ledger we would like to have your name on our list. The Ledger is only $1.00 per year.

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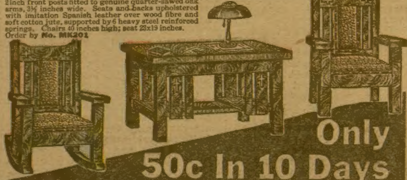

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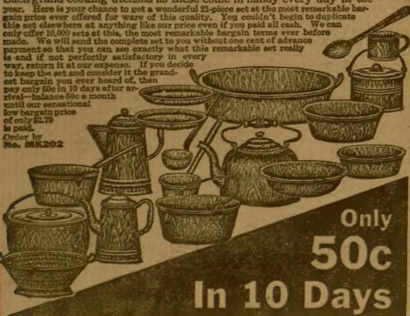

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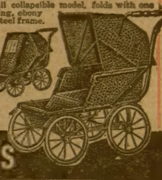

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Send Only This Coupon Now

Hartman Furniture & Carpet Co.,
3926 Wentworth Ave.
Chicago, Ill.

Place an X in ☐ opposite bargains wanted, fill in and mail us coupon.

Dishes MK200 ☐ Library Set MK201 ☐
Enamelware MK202 ☐ Go-Cart MK199 ☐

I will return merchandise or remit you $.......... in ten days after arrival of goods and pay you $......... a month until total price of $............... has been paid. If more than one bargain is selected fill in total amount of 10 day and monthly payments and total price.

Name ....

P. O. Box, Address ....

Town .... State 55

If only catalog is wanted, write name and address on lines above.